May is Hepatitis Awareness Month! Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E are all reportable in Massachusetts. This month’s ePostcard highlights recent changes to acute hepatitis C surveillance and resources available to local health departments (LBOH) to assist with investigating acute hepatitis C (HCV) cases.

What are the goals of acute HCV case investigation?

- To prevent additional cases by providing information to the HCV-infected individual on how to avoid exposing others.
- To improve outcomes for HCV-infected individuals by educating them on the importance of continued medical evaluations and providing referrals to medical or support services.
- To identify clusters of cases or outbreaks, particularly those that appear to involve healthcare-associated transmission. The more quickly we can identify these situations the more quickly we can stop further transmission.

What changes have been made to acute HCV surveillance?

- The MDPH Acute Hepatitis C Case Report Form (ACRF) was updated in February 2015. This form was streamlined to 2 pages by eliminating questions not critical to meeting the goals outlined above and can be accessed from the MAVEN Help section.
- In April 2015, MDPH expanded the age ranges that raise suspicion of acute status.
  - Previously, ACRFs were sent to providers for cases between the ages of 15 and 25 years.
  - Now, any case of HCV infection between 15 and 29 years of age or 70 years or older is considered a suspect acute case and an ACRF will be sent to the provider for completion.
  - These cases may be assigned to the local health department for follow-up if we do not receive a completed ACRF from the provider or if transmission is thought to be healthcare-associated.
- The standard MDPH Hepatitis C Case Report Form will continue to be sent to providers to complete for HCV cases that are under 15 years or between 30 and 69 years of age. This 1 page form was updated in March 2014 to better capture risk information that may indicate a case was a result of healthcare-associated transmission.
  - These cases may be assigned to the local health department for follow-up if jaundice or gastroenteritis symptoms are noted, there is evidence of elevated liver enzymes or recent seroconversion, or if transmission is thought to be healthcare-associated.

What is the role of the MDPH Epidemiology Program in acute HCV investigations?

- To identify cases that may be acute or have transmission related to healthcare and determine if further follow-up is necessary.
- To assign suspect acute HCV cases (only in the situations described above) to the local health department.
- To serve as a resource to local health departments investigating suspect acute cases.
- To investigate clusters and work with healthcare facilities on potential healthcare-associated transmission events.
What is the role of the local health department in acute HCV investigations?
- To educate the individual on ways they can reduce the risk of transmission to others.
- To provide referrals to the individual for medical or support services as needed.
- To collect missing data on the case, particularly information about an individual’s possible exposures.

NOTE: Cases of HCV infection that are not assigned to the local health department do not need to be investigated.

What resources are available?

To conduct an acute HCV case investigation:
Details on how to conduct an acute HCV case investigation, including MAVEN screen shots, can be found in the tip sheet “Investigating Acute Hepatitis C Cases”. This recently updated tip sheet is available online in the MAVEN Help section.

To educate individuals on ways they can reduce the risk of transmission to others:
Viral hepatitis fact sheets can be found here in multiple languages:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Viral Hepatitis has extensive information on viral hepatitis including patient education materials, that can be found at the CDC website here: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

To provide referrals for medical or support services:
Information about available resources can be found in the HIV/AIDS Service and Resource Guide, available online here: www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/aids/resources-guide.pdf.
If no services are listed in your area, your local community health centers may be able to help.

To educate yourself on viral hepatitis:
We presented a webinar on viral hepatitis that covered both hepatitis B and C case investigation in April of 2014. It is available in the MAVEN Help section. We hope to do another webinar in the coming year.

We want to provide you with the resources you need. If there is particular topic related to viral hepatitis that you feel you need more training on, please e-mail Shauna Onofrey from the MDPH, Epidemiology Program at shauna.onofrey@state.ma.us.

If you have questions about MAVEN, please email isishelp@state.ma.us or contact the MAVEN help desk at 617-983-6801.
If you have questions about acute HCV investigations, please contact the Epidemiology Program at 617-983-6800.