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# Hepatitis A outbreak not likely

By Catherine Blalock  
 Staff Reporter

Although five people have been diagnosed with Hepatitis A in the last month, there is no indication of an outbreak, said one health department official.  
 A food handler was diagnosed with Hepatitis A on Thursday. That case and the first case discovered in August are probably linked, said Lori Vrtiska Seibel, a Lincoln-Lancaster Health Department official.

The two parties know each other, she said.  
 "He really didn't have contact with food," Seibel said of the most recent case. "We feel the public risk is very low."  
 The term "food handler" is used very loosely, she said, to mean anyone working in a restaurant.  
 All other employees of the restaurant have tested negative for Hepatitis A, she said.  
 "If it changes we will be the first to tell the public," Seibel said.  
 During the week of Sept. 4, three cases were diagnosed.

It is unusual to have three cases reported in one week, said Carol Mitchell, the communicable disease coordinator for the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department. But there is no indication that those cases are linked.

Since classes began, no cases have been diagnosed on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus, said Dr. Joseph Hermesen of the University Health Center.

Hepatitis A is spread through shared food, not casual contact, Mitchell said. She said people infected with Hepatitis A experience flu-like symptoms such as fatigue, nausea and vomiting. The two key symptoms are coffee-colored urine and jaundice, a yellowing of the skin.

To reduce the risk of contacting the virus, Mitchell said, people simply need to wash their hands.

"Everybody should be washing their hands," she said. "The best defense is hand washing."

To make sure that people infected don't spread the virus to others, she said, those in close contact with them have been given antibiotics.

Once people have been affected with Hepatitis A, they may or may not face a recurrence, Mitchell said.

It's like chicken pox, she said — some people will get the virus and it will never come back. Others may get it again.

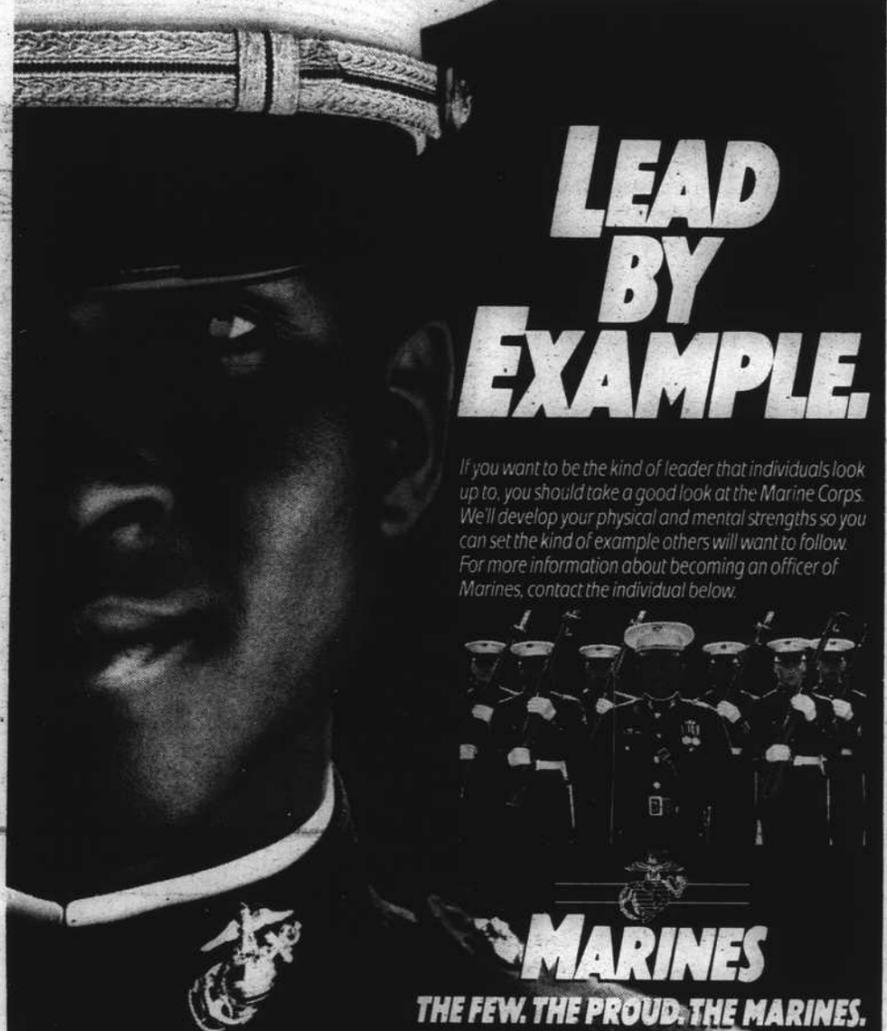
Several cases are normally reported to the Health Center during a school term because it is a common disorder, Hermesen said.

In 1994, five Hepatitis A cases were reported to the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department. Mitchell said that number was below the average.

Because the initial symptoms resemble the flu virus, people with Hepatitis A tend to avoid seeing a physician until the key symptoms develop, Mitchell said. Those who believe they have been infected with the virus should see a doctor as soon as possible, she said.

Hermesen said the Health Center offered a \$24 diagnostic blood test.

Some students, wanting a little extra precaution from catching the virus, have visited the Health Center for a \$57 vaccination. The vaccine became available this spring, he said, but it is unknown how long the vaccine is good for.



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