

February 22, 1996



MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Environmental Health Directors, Supervisors
and Coordinators

FROM: Susan C. Grayson, Branch Head *SCG*
Food, Lodging & Institutional Sanitation Branch

Ed Norman, Branch Head *EN*
Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch

SUBJECT: Hepatitis A

In recent conversations with public health officials in Tennessee, they have informed us that they have been experiencing an increase in Hepatitis A cases. There were 900 cases in Memphis in 1995 and a recent outbreak in Knoxville. As you may remember, Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) is a cyclical disease, hitting a peak in North Carolina every 10 years, plus or minus 2 years. (There are cases every year.) The last time HAV peaked in North Carolina, it began with an outbreak in early 1988, so we are now within the possible realm of an increase in HAV in our communities.

Environmental health specialists should be carefully observing handwashing in restaurants, nursing homes, day cares, etc. The virus is passed through fecal-oral contact by persons who are incubating the disease and failing to wash their hands well. In the last cycle of 1988-1990, we experienced outbreaks in restaurants and day care facilities, so please pay particular attention to handwashing and food preparation in these facilities. The disease can be spread through foods that are touched by fecally-contaminated hands and receive no further heat treatment. So check to make sure that personnel who are engaged in activities such as putting ice in glasses, making salads and cold sandwiches and other similar activities are scrupulous in their handwashing. Day care personnel should be observed for diaper changing methods (handwashing) and to determine whether or not hands are washed prior to feeding children. In addition, please observe whether or not children's hands are washed after they use the toilet and before meals, beverages and snacks. These observations are most important in the infant and toddler areas where children are diapered. Remember that HAV outbreaks in day cares are characteristically found when caregivers and parents become ill (many children never jaundice), so interviews with confirmed hepatitis cases are important.

Individuals are most infectious for approximately two weeks prior to onset of jaundice (and for up to one week afterwards); therefore, the person may appear well and still transmit disease. **HANDWASHING IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PREVENTATIVE MEASURE.**

At this time, we would also suggest that specialists contact their Epi-Teams for

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES SECTION

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copies of the Hepatitis A brochures distributed in 1988 and 1989 ("Facts About Hepatitis A"). There are two forms of this brochure, one aimed at food service providers and another that includes diaper changing information. This office will be placing a print order on these and they should be available in a couple of months. Your Epi-Team should also have information on management of foodhandlers and children in day care in the event of an outbreak. In addition, if you are a member of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), you may wish to contact NEHA to obtain the publication, "Guidelines for Handling Hepatitis A in the Foodservice Industry".

You may also wish to examine some of the following articles for background and understanding of the disease and its control:

"Epidemiology of Hepatitis A in North Carolina in 1988". Epi Notes. 1989; 89: 1-8.

"Viral Hepatitis A". Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. 15th Edition, Abram S. Benenson, Ed. 1995; 217-220.

"Chemical Disinfection of Hepatitis A Virus on Environmental Surfaces". Applied and Environmental Microbiology. 1990; 56: 3601-3604.

"Control of Foodborne Hepatitis A", 1991, Epi Notes; 91-2: 1-3.

As we are in the process of transferring the responsibilities of the Day Care Sanitation Program to the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch staff, those of you with day care questions should call Ed Norman at 919-715-3293 first; however, any of our food, lodging and institutional sanitation staff will attempt to assist you in the event of an emergency situation.

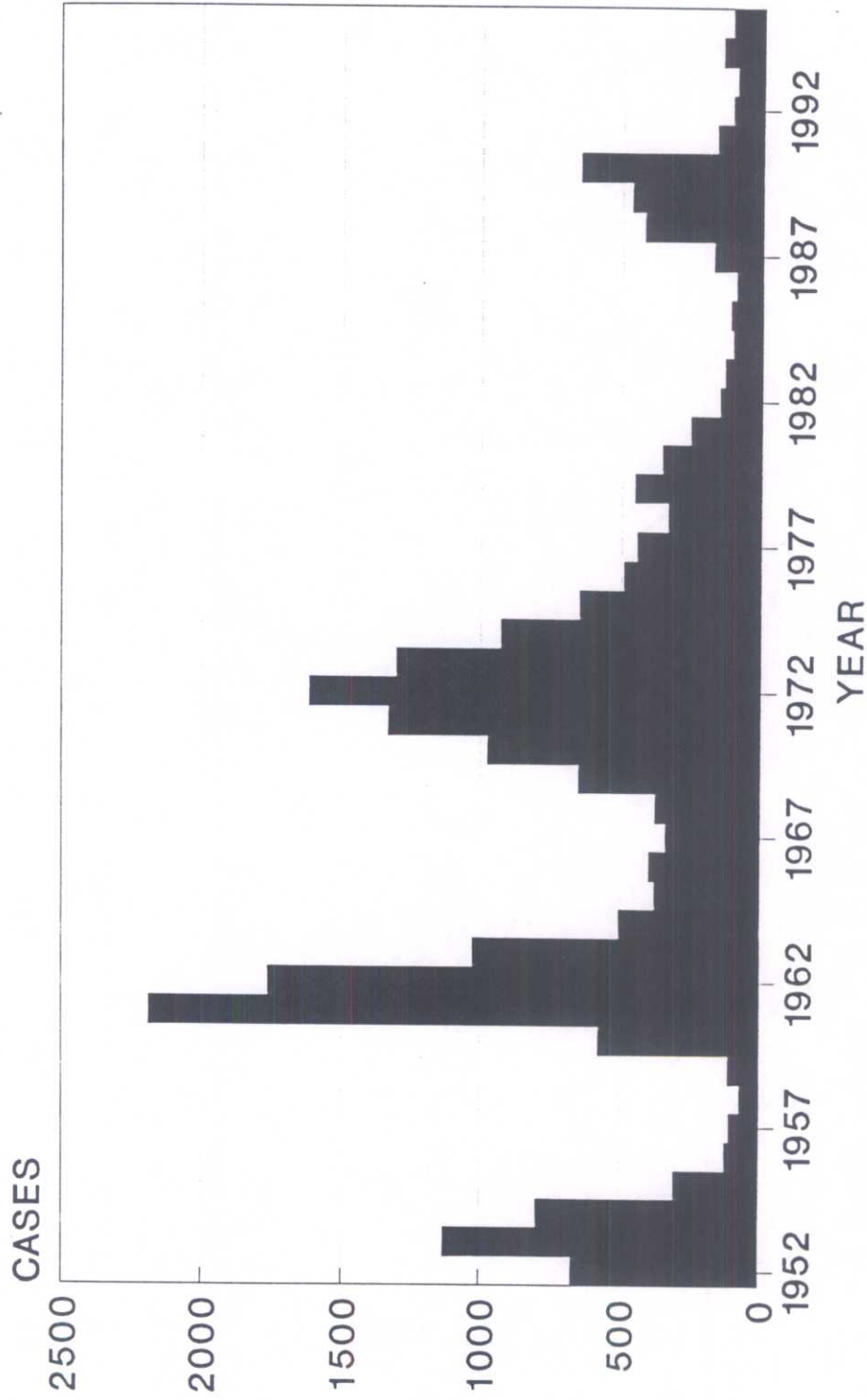
SCG/ak

cc: Local Health Directors
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HEPATITIS A, NC 1952-1995



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