

HEALTH DEPARTMENT OVERCAME CHALLENGES TO VACCINATE FOR HEPATITIS A BEFORE ELECTRIC FOREST

Summertime in Michigan is booming with residents and visitors enjoying our lakes, trails, campgrounds, concerts and festivals. Summer 2018 poses a challenge because Michigan is currently experiencing an outbreak of hepatitis A, a highly contagious virus spread through feces of infected people that can cause severe liver damage, and sometimes death. Festivals like the Electric Forest, an 8-day music festival held each year in Rothbury, Michigan, are the perfect venue for viruses like hepatitis A to spread.

Conducted over two weekends in June at the Double JJ Resort, the Electric Forest draws almost 50,000 people from all over the country and the world to experience the music, art, and community engagement throughout the forest. Consider 50,000 party-goers eating, drinking, dancing, frolicking in the forest, most likely not paying attention to washing their hands after using the port-a-johns.

That's where the superheroes of District Health Department #10 come in. Armed with the knowledge that getting vaccinated and washing hands are the best ways to prevent getting or spreading hepatitis A, DHD#10 staff, including our Medical Director, public health nurses, health educators, community outreach workers, and environmental health sanitarians, set out to do their jobs. The first goal was to get permission from the festival promoters, Madison House Presents, to set up vaccination clinics inside the Electric Forest venue during the festival. Permission was not granted so the team had to switch gears.

DHD#10 staff, including Immunization Coordinator Robin Walicki, faced the challenge head on. "We were strongly urged by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to host a vaccination clinic during the festival, and when we were denied access inside the venue, we had to find alternative ways to protect people," stated Walicki. "Our food sanitarian, Emily Hollingsworth, was already providing hepatitis A prevention outreach to all food vendors for the festival who were staying at the Double JJ Resort. Her connection with the General Manager, Greg Mottashed, gave us the opportunity we needed to secure a location right at the resort." Mottashed allowed DHD#10 to set up a vaccination clinic in the basement of their Sundance Saloon. "I was concerned about the risk of hepatitis A for my own staff so it made sense to have the clinic here," stated Mottashed. "My food and housekeeping staff interacted with festival attendees and participated in the festival themselves, so it was important to me that they be protected."

Beginning at 9:00 AM on Tuesday, June 19, people were lined up to receive their hepatitis A vaccine at the Double JJ Resort. DHD#10 staff worked until after 4 PM that day and vaccinated 142 people from 21 different states and two countries. They also hosted some walk-in clinics at the health department in Hart for those who were unable to get vaccinated during the special clinic. "The response was outstanding," stated Walicki. "Typically, we only see one- to two-dozen people at clinics like this."

People at higher risk for having or contracting hepatitis A include food vendors and festival crew who often have transient living conditions. Other high-risk groups include



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those in jail or recently in jail, corrections officers that work in jails, and law enforcement officers and first responders who may come in contact with infected people.

During the months of May and June leading up to the Electric Forest, DHD#10 staff performed a great deal of outreach throughout Oceana County to educate and protect people from hepatitis A, including:

- Held vaccine clinics for jail inmates, jail staff, and road patrol deputies
- Held vaccine clinic for Michigan State Police, Hart Post
- Held vaccine clinic for Oceana EMS and First Responders
- Held vaccine clinic for Grant Township Rescue (Rothbury)
- Held vaccine clinic at The Ladder Community Center between the two Electric Forest weekends
- Held four additional walk-in clinic dates for Electric Forest food vendors and staff
- Distributed hepatitis A education flyers and posters throughout Oceana County, including in Rothbury at WESCO, Michigan Grow Store, and Lucky Lake Campground
- Updated Public Health Muskegon County and Mercy Health Lakeshore Campus Infection Control on all DHD#10 hepatitis A outreach plans, and these two organizations also helped spread the word about outreach activities

Overall, the hard work performed by DHD#10 staff prior to and during the Electric Forest enhanced community partnerships and provided great learning opportunities. DHD#10 is currently monitoring hepatitis A outbreak data to determine if the virus impacted festival-goers, staff, and vendors. For more information on the hepatitis A outbreak in Michigan, go to www.michigan.gov/hepatitisaoutbreak.

About DHD#10

District Health Department #10 (DHD #10) is Michigan's largest geographical health department, mandated to promote and protect the public from unsafe and hazardous conditions and provide methods of promoting good health and disease prevention. Some of the vital programs provided by DHD#10 include Immunizations, Infectious Disease Control, STI Testing and Counseling, WIC, Maternal Infant Health Program, Healthy Families Northern Michigan, Children's Special Health Services, Hearing and Vision Screening, Family Planning, Cancer Screening, Worksite Wellness, Smoking Cessation, Substance Use Prevention, Chronic Disease Prevention, and Environmental Health Services. DHD#10 serves Crawford, Kalkaska, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, and Wexford counties. For more information, visit www.dhd10.org.

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PICTURES INCLUDED BELOW



Wesley Tischoff, a contractor with the Electric Forest, receives a hepatitis A vaccination from DHD#10 public health nurse, Claire Janson.



DHD#10 public health nurses, Claire Jansen, Robin Walicki, and Sarah Stickney, prepare for hepatitis A vaccination clinic at the Double JJ Resort prior to the Electric Forest.