

## MID-MICHIGAN

# Hepatitis A still a problem

At least twelve confirmed cases cited in nearby localities

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**By Sean Bradley**

*Sbradley@digitalfirstmedia.com*  
*@MorningSunSean on Twitter*

Hepatitis A is still spreading throughout mid-Michigan.

There have been eight confirmed cases in Isabella County, three in Gratiot County and one in Clare County as of March 21 since tracking began on Aug. 1, 2016, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. However, the case in Clare County is not part of the jurisdiction of the outbreak.

“The numbers aren’t high but the thing of it is, it is spreading,” said Leslie Kinnee, Public Information Officer with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department, which covers Gratiot, Clinton and Montcalm counties. “We want people to be diligent and be aware that this illness is circulating in our communities because if we don’t act now and take measures to try to stop it, it will continue to spread.”

The number of cases in Isabella County has steadily increased since last fall and winter.

There were five reported cases in Isabella County between September and December.

A case in that county stemmed from a bakery employee at Meijer in Mt. Pleasant.

However, none of the cases in Isabella, Gratiot and Clare counties have been fatal.

In addition, the cases in Isabella County were linked to southeast Michigan, where the outbreak began in 2016.

Statewide, there have been 789 cases, 635

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# Cases

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hospitalizations (with a 80.5 percent hospitalization rate) and 25 deaths.

“This is the largest outbreak in the country at this time. The outbreak has been spreading faster into western and northern Michigan (although there are many fewer cases than in Southeast),” said Marcus Cheatham, Health Officer with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

“It seems to have slowed down a little but that may just be seasonal and it might take off again.”

The virus is passing person-to person through close contact, particularly through drug use, sexual activity, and among household members.

“Hepatitis A is spread by the fecal-oral route,” said Dr. Jennifer Morse, Medical Director for the Central Michigan District Health Department, in November.

“This means you can get ill if you eat, drink, or touch your mouth with any food, drink, object, or your hands that may have been in contact with stool (feces) from someone infected with hepatitis A. Washing your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom and before handling or eating food can help prevent this.”