

b A case of fulminant hepatitis B at a home for mentally impaired persons

In October 2016, a mental health institution in Gauteng Province requested assistance from the Department of Health and the NICD following the death of a resident due to hepatitis B (HBV). An investigation was conducted with the aim of identifying susceptible persons for hepatitis B vaccination.

The institution did not have a consistent policy regarding hepatitis B vaccination of residents or staff. A total of 194 persons (94 residents, eight care facilitators and 92 day workers and auxiliary staff members), out of an estimated 200 persons living or working on the premises, consented to HBV serological screening. Amongst 192 persons for whom results were available, 63 (33%) were immune, and 127 (66%) were susceptible to hepatitis B and required vaccination. Five (2.6%) persons, all females and aged between 23-43 years, had evidence of chronic hepatitis infection and were referred for chronic care. All but one of these patients had low copy numbers of circulating hepatitis B DNA, and all had only slightly raised or normal alanine transaminase levels. Vaccination of susceptible persons was commenced using vaccine provid-

ed by the Gauteng Department of Health, and to date, there have been no further cases of acute HBV.

HBV is spread by contact with infected blood, semen and other body fluids via sexual transmission, contact with blood or vertically from mother to child. HBV vaccination was incorporated into the routine childhood immunisation schedule (Expanded Programme on Immunisation) in South Africa in 1995. Institutionalized persons older than 21 years are unlikely to have been vaccinated. This investigation highlights the importance of vaccination against hepatitis B, particularly amongst health care workers and institutionalised persons. Institutions should review their policies and vaccinate staff and residents who lack documented evidence of receipt of vaccine.

Source: Division of Public Health, Surveillance and Response, Centre for Vaccines and Immunology, Field Epidemiology Training Programme, NICD-NHLS; Gauteng and West Rand Departments of Health. (outbreak@nicd.ac.za)