Investigation of Medical Clinic for Possible Bloodborne Virus Exposure

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department is currently investigating one medical office in the county where patients may have been exposed to blood borne viruses. An active and thorough investigation is being conducted to determine if anyone has acquired a bloodborne virus due to unsafe infection control practices during injection procedures at this medical office.

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department became aware of the possible exposures while investigating a case of Hepatitis C that may have been acquired from an injection at the local medical practice. During this investigation, the medical office was observed not following standard/universal precautions to protect themselves and their patients. The healthcare professional at this medical clinic is cooperating in providing patient records and other relevant information. If any patients are found to be infected, patients will be linked to medical care and treatment will be provided in a timely manner.

Patients could have possibly been exposed to Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Patients at risk will be tested for each of the three conditions. Test results will be provided to patients as soon as possible.

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department has taken an aggressive approach since learning about the possible exposures. The medical clinic was closed by order of the Health Officer. Patients who are potentially at risk of having contracted a bloodborne virus are being identified and contacted individually. Arrangements have been made for laboratory testing of blood specimens for all at-risk patients. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the California Department of Public Health are consulting with the county. The three health agencies are working closely together on this investigation. An information phone line is being established for patients who receive notification of their potential risk. Frequently asked questions and other relevant information are being prepared and provided to patients.

Health Officer Dr. Charity Dean explained, "A priority in this investigation is testing each of the patients who are possibly at risk for contracting a bloodborne virus. Each patient is receiving written guidance on where and how to obtain laboratory testing in a timely manner."

These conditions are not transmitted through casual contact. There is no risk to members of the public who did not have injection procedures at the one medical office.

We are actively investigating the situation to determine if diseases were transmitted and why.

###