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## **Hepatitis C Outbreak Investigation in Minot was Completed and Will Not Be Re-Opened**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) finalized its investigation of the hepatitis C outbreak in Minot several years ago and will not be re-opening the investigation. The NDDoH has received requests to re-open the hepatitis C investigation in Minot. These requests claimed that there is new information in the case or that further investigation should be done. The NDDoH holds the health and welfare of the public as the first consideration in this outbreak investigation, and if new information were received that indicated ongoing transmission of the disease or otherwise altered the data or findings from the prior investigation, NDDoH would review that information. After careful consideration, the Department has determined that there is no new information in the case and that the investigation is complete and will not be re-opened.

“There is no evidence of ongoing transmission of hepatitis C in the Minot area related to this outbreak. The points raised in the requests were considered by the Department in the original investigation and nothing new has been presented. Allegations that the investigation was incomplete, that it was not appropriately staffed, that testing was confined to residents of one facility, and that an employee of Trinity should have been barred from work by the Department of Health are either inaccurate or not within the Department’s authority,” according to Kirby Kruger, Medical Services Section Chief for the NDDoH.

When asked whether the CDC did not adequately staff the investigation because of a government shutdown, Kruger indicated that the CDC was engaged as soon as the first three cases were identified. CDC stationed multiple national experts on the scene in Minot for over a month for direct support. In addition, CDC staff was engaged and available at CDC headquarters for advice and consultation. “The CDC is the leading disease investigation agency in the world, and they were a crucial partner in this investigation from the very beginning,” continued Kruger.

The suggestion that the Department confined testing to one facility and failed to test other people in the community who might have been exposed to the virus is not accurate. The first testing was done at the primary facility identified in the outbreak. However, to aid in defining the scope of the outbreak, the Department tested more than 1800 people at other long term care and assisted living facilities and others who may have had exposure to the virus. NDDoH continues to do surveillance for the disease in Minot. The most recent round of testing occurred in January and February of this year and involved 400 people; no additional cases related to the outbreak have been identified.

Drug diversion is a common cause of hepatitis C outbreaks, and it is always considered during these investigations. Drug diversion was investigated by both the CDC and NDDoH in relation to this outbreak, but no definitive epidemiological evidence supported the theory that drug diversion was the cause of the outbreak. Because drug diversion is a crime and the NDDoH has no authority over or ability to investigate crimes, the Department contacted the Bureau of Criminal Investigations early on in the investigation.

Many hepatitis C outbreaks go ‘unsolved’ – that is, no cause of transmission is definitively identified. The investigation in Minot by NDDoH was exhaustive and thorough. Although the lack of definitive answers can be frustrating to those involved in the outbreak and the investigation, it is not unusual because of the complexity of these cases. If new information is received about the outbreak, the Department will consider it and respond appropriately. To date, no new information has been received.

For more information, contact Kirby Kruger at [kkruger@nd.gov](mailto:kkruger@nd.gov) or at 701.328.2378.

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