

New York parishioners face possible hepatitis A exposure from Communion

NEW YORK - The Nassau County Department of Health on New York's Long Island is offering immune globulin or hepatitis A vaccine to parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Massapequa Park who might have been exposed to hepatitis A when receiving Communion at two Christmas Day Masses.

Mary Ellen Laurain, a spokeswoman for the department, said an individual "involved in the Communion process" had tested positive for the hepatitis A virus but would not say whether any parishioners who attended the 10:30 a.m. or noon Masses Dec. 25 had contracted the virus.

"We pray that no one comes down with this virus," said Sean P. Dolan, director of communications for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, in a Jan. 3 statement.

He said the diocese and the parish were "cooperating fully" with the health department and urged parishioners who attended either of the two Masses to contact the department, which planned to offer vaccinations in the parish school's auditorium Jan. 4 and 5.

The department said in a Jan. 3 statement that anyone exposed to hepatitis A "should receive immune globulin or a hepatitis A vaccination within two weeks of exposure."

It said the virus can be spread "by consuming food or drink that has been handled by an infected person" or by "putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A."

"Casual contact, as in sitting in church during Mass, office or school setting, does not spread the virus," it added.

Monsignor James P. Lisante, former director of the diocesan Office of Family

Ministry and host of nationally syndicated television programs, is pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, which has about 7,500 families.