

Hepatitis reports reach epidemic proportions

By Claudia Perkins
Managing Editor

Hepatitis has reached the epidemic stage, according to Dr. Doyle Lansford, health officer for the City of Arlington.

"I would have to say that infectious hepatitis has reached the epidemic stage now," Dr. Lansford said Monday afternoon.

Monday 110 cases of hepatitis had been reported, compared to 12 cases this time last year.

"This is the total for the entire year, but most of these are from the past two months. Also, the number is higher because of the unusually good reporting. There is a definite increase over the usual."

Dr. W. V. Bradshaw, director of city and county health in Fort and Tarrant County, said Arlington had a definite increase over the number of reported cases in Fort Worth.

"It is unusual in Arlington," Dr. Bradshaw said, "because there are not as many cases in Fort Worth as in Arlington and it is four times bigger than Arlington. Arlington has twice as much now as Fort Worth had last year."

"There is no definition for an epidemic," he added. "An epidemic is any disease with an unusual increase in the number of cases over a given period of time."

The state epidemiologists have been notified of Arlington's hepatitis outbreak, he said.

Dr. Warren Jurgensen, director of the Health Center, said eight cases had been reported by Oct. 1 and the 10 days prior to that date.

"Some persons have checked into the Health Center," he said, "but I don't think any of these persons would have been hospitalized had they lived at home or had someone else to care for them."

contacting the disease have been college age or from 16 to 25 years old, but that few have been hospitalized.

"This type of hepatitis is spread primarily from person to person," he said. "Control of the spread depends on avoiding exposure. Persons are exposed by drinking or eating after a person with the disease. Also persons should observe personal hygiene and avoid eating in public restaurants."

Infectious hepatitis is a viral disease affecting the liver, according to the Arlington Branch Medical Society.

The society says there are two types of infectious hepatitis. Virus A is the more contagious form, spreading by direct contact with infected persons or from contaminated food or water containing the virus.

Virus B is usually spread by needles but is also mildly contagious orally.

"Type B is more severe," Dr. Lansford said. "It causes more liver damage and will last longer. The virus found in Arlington, however, is the A type and is treated mainly through outpatient clinics."

"One type protection a person might use is gamma globulin injections. Primarily, persons who know they have been exposed by close-contact with infected persons should get the injections. They should remember, however, that the injections are not permanent and last only one month to six weeks."

Gamma globulin injections are available at the Health Center for \$2 and \$4.

Incubation period after exposure is one week to a month.

"Recuperation periods vary from those not clinically ill to two to three weeks," Lansford said.

Dr. Jurgensen said it isn't unusual for infected persons to show no yellowness of skin or to feel sick, especially among children.

"So you might, in retrospect, just not be feeling good and have it," he said.

The early symptoms of infectious hepatitis are very nondescript and cannot be differentiated from the many other viral diseases. Later, a person may experience loss of taste for cigarettes, nausea, loss of appetite, darkened urine, light-colored feces and yellow eyes.

Dr. Lansford said most of the persons