

Recent Developments in the Control of Hepatitis A in the United States

Frederic E. Shaw, MD, JD

Texas Department of Health, Austin, Texas, USA

In most of the world, the control of hepatitis A has not yet become a high priority. However, in the United States, where the disease is highly endemic in many regions, control programs against hepatitis A have progressed rapidly. Hepatitis A vaccine has been used to interrupt the transmission of hepatitis A during communitywide outbreaks and to prevent outbreaks in areas with historically high rates. In several such areas, including many American Indian Reservations, vaccination is now routine for all children, and the rate of hepatitis A has dropped significantly. Early this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended routine

vaccination for all children in eleven U.S. states where the average annual incidence rate during the period 1987 to 1997 was greater than or equal to 20 per 100,000 (approximately twice the national average).

The development of hepatitis A control policies in the U.S. has been based on a detailed knowledge of the epidemiology of the disease in specific geographical areas. The success of these policies reflects a strong social and financial commitment by the federal government to the control of hepatitis A through mass vaccination.