

# The Hepatitis B Epidemic

## What is Hepatitis B?

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is an infectious disease that attacks the liver. It can cause chronic liver disease and is a primary cause of liver cancer and liver transplantation. Up to 25% of people with chronic HBV develop serious liver problems. Hepatitis B is a silent virus. Symptoms can take up to 30 years to develop.

## How is it Spread?

HBV is spread through blood, semen, or other body fluids from an infected person. It is primarily transmitted through sexual contact, sharing needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment, needle stick injuries and perinatally from an infected mother to her baby at birth. Although uncommon, outbreaks of HBV have occurred from specimen contamination in medical settings.

## Is Hepatitis B Preventable?

Yes. There has been a vaccine against HBV since 1982. Newborns should be vaccinated at birth and most states require children to be vaccinated for school entry. However higher rates of hepatitis B continue among at-risk adults who remain unvaccinated.

## Is Hepatitis B Manageable?

Yes. There are effective treatments that can significantly improve health and delay or reverse the effects of liver disease in those who develop chronic infection. However treatment and medical management may not be right for everyone and similar to HIV, requires lifelong treatment. There is currently no cure for HBV.

## Who is at Highest Risk?

For acute HBV, African American adults have the highest rate of infection overall and rates are highest in the southern region of the United States. Drug users and gay and bisexual men are at increased risk of infection. For chronic HBV, Asian Americans have the highest rate of prevalence with as many as 1 in 10 living with chronic HBV and HBV-caused liver cancer is a leading cause of death among Asian Americans.

## Getting Tested is Easy

Up to 65 percent of people chronically infected with HBV do not know it. A simple and inexpensive test can be done to determine one's status. Earlier identification and medical evaluation is necessary to mitigate disease.

## Hepatitis B Virus Facts

- Up to 1.4 million Americans are infected with chronic HBV
- Approximately 43,000 new HBV infections were estimated in 2007
- Up to 3,000 deaths resulted from chronic HBV infection in 2007
- Up to 65% of those chronically infected do not know it
- The annual cost of treatment of HBV is approximately \$2.5 billion (\$2,000 per infected person)
- More than \$1 billion is spent each year for hepatitis B-related hospitalizations
- Up to 15 percent of persons living with HIV are also infected with HBV

## What are the Barriers to Hepatitis B Services?

There is no dedicated federal funding of core hepatitis B services.

CDC funds a Perinatal Hepatitis B Coordinator position in 66 jurisdictions tasked with preventing and controlling transmission of HBV from an infected mother to her newborn. In addition, CDC funds an Adult Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinator position in 55 jurisdictions tasked with preventing and controlling the viral hepatitis epidemics. Both positions do not receive any dedicated funding for services.

There is a lack of prioritization from CDC leadership. CDC leadership does not consider hepatitis B to be a winnable battle. Despite longstanding federal recommendations, proven cost-effectiveness of vaccination and lack of a Vaccines for Adults program, CDC discontinued its At-Risk Adult Hepatitis B Vaccination Initiative at the end of FY2010 due to lack of funding.

Since HBV disproportionately impacts groups that may not access the traditional health care system, public health departments and community based organizations should be funded to provide culturally and linguistically competent services.

*For more information, visit [www.NASTAD.org](http://www.NASTAD.org)*

# The Hepatitis C Epidemic

## What is Hepatitis C?

The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is an infectious disease that attacks the liver. It can cause chronic liver disease and is a primary cause of liver cancer and liver transplantation. Up to 85% of people develop chronic infection of HCV. Hepatitis C is a silent virus. Symptoms can take up to 30 years to develop. Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne, chronic viral disease in the United States.

## How is it Spread?

HCV is spread through blood-to-blood contact. Today, most people become infected by sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs and less frequently through sexual contact. Before widespread screening of the blood supply began in 1992, HCV was commonly spread through blood transfusions, blood products and organ transplants. Although uncommon, outbreaks of HCV have occurred from blood contamination in medical settings.

## Is Hepatitis C Preventable?

Yes. While there is no vaccine for HCV and research is being conducted to develop one, steps can be taken to prevent infection through risk reduction strategies and syringe exchange programs. It is important for people to not share personal items that may come into contact with blood, get tattoos or body piercings that are unsterilized and take precautions to protect against blood exposure through sexual contact.

## Is Hepatitis C Manageable?

Yes. There are current and upcoming therapies that will increase cure rates up to 75 percent and decrease treatment duration from one year to six months for people living with chronic hepatitis C.

## Who is at Highest Risk?

Persons likely to have chronic HCV infection include those who received a blood transfusion before 1992 and past or current injection-drug users (IDUs). Up to 90% of IDUs are estimated to be infected with HCV. In addition, gay and bisexual men are at increased risk of infection, persons living with HIV, and African Americans and Latinos have a higher rate of HCV infection than whites. Further it is estimated that over 2.5 million or two-thirds of chronic hepatitis C cases are among baby boomers (adults born between 1946-1964).

*For more information, visit [www.NASTAD.org](http://www.NASTAD.org)*

## Hepatitis C Virus Facts

- Up to 4 million Americans are infected with chronic HCV
- Approximately 17,000 new HCV infections were estimated in 2007
- Up to 12,000 deaths resulted from chronic HCV infection in 2007
- The medical costs of HCV are expected to increase from \$30 billion in 2009 to over \$85 billion in 2024
- Up to 30 percent of people living with HIV are also infected with HCV

## Getting Tested is Easy

Up to 75 percent of people chronically infected with HCV do not know it. A simple and inexpensive test can be done to determine one's status. Earlier identification and medical evaluation is necessary to mitigate disease.

## What are the Barriers to Hepatitis C Services?

There is no dedicated federal funding of core hepatitis C services. CDC funds an Adult Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinator position in 55 jurisdictions tasked with preventing and controlling the viral hepatitis epidemics with an average award of \$90,000. The position does not receive any dedicated funding for services.

There is no dedicated federal funding for syringe exchange programs. Since the lifting of the federal funding ban on syringe exchange services in FY2010, guidance from the federal government and unfettered implementation on the ground level has yet to occur. Access to syringe exchange can greatly reduce incidence of HCV.

There is a lack of prioritization from CDC leadership. CDC leadership does not consider hepatitis C to be a winnable battle despite current and upcoming treatments that eradicate the virus in a majority of people.

Since HCV disproportionately impacts groups that may not access the traditional health care system, public health departments and community based organizations should be funded to provide culturally and linguistically competent services.