



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



National Hepatitis Testing Day



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BURLINGTON – May 19 is National Hepatitis Testing Day. The Vermont Department of Health reminds Vermonters at risk to get tested for Hepatitis C (also known as Hep C), a form of viral hepatitis that is spread from person to person through blood to blood contact.

Based on national estimates, 3.2 million people in the U.S. – and 12,000 to 18,000 Vermonters – have chronic Hepatitis C. About 75 percent of people with the virus do not know it.

“We recommend that specific people get a Hep C antibody test due to their risk factors,” said Patsy Kelso, state epidemiologist for infectious disease. “Baby boomers should get tested by their doctors because the prevalence is so high among that group.”

In the U.S., three out of every four people with chronic Hep C were born between 1945 through 1965.

Baby boomers could have become infected from receiving contaminated blood and blood products before widespread screening of the blood supply began in 1992. Others may have become infected from injecting drugs, even if only once in the past.

“People who share syringes for injecting drugs are another population at significant risk for Hep C infection,” said Kelso. “It is an efficient route of transmission with a high prevalence among this group nationally.”

About 17,000 new Hep C infections occur each year in the U.S. It is estimated that 20 percent of people who get infected with Hep C are able to clear the virus within weeks of becoming infected. Most others will develop a chronic infection causing liver inflammation that can lead to dysfunction or damage over time. People with chronic Hep C can take steps to keep their livers healthy and avoid more severe complications later on.

The impact of Hep C infection on the liver varies. About 5-20 percent of people with chronic Hep C develop cirrhosis (a toughening of tissues that reduces liver function) or liver cancer over a period of 20-30 years. There are treatments for people with Hep C associated cirrhosis.

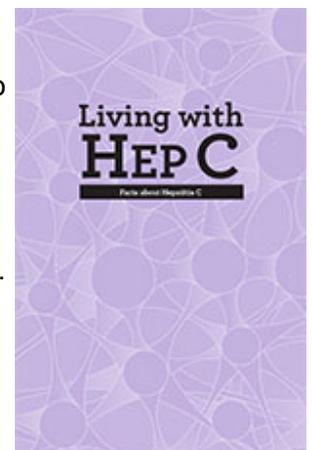
“Many people with this infection will have a low level of liver damage that is stable or progresses slowly and may never need treatment,” Kelso said. “For anyone with chronic Hep C, reducing or eliminating alcohol intake, eating a balanced diet and staying engaged in medical care will lead to better health outcomes.”

For more information about hepatitis C go to healthvermont.gov or visit your local Health Department **district office**. See our new publication **Living with HEP C: Facts about Hepatitis C** for people who are newly diagnosed.

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