



# **Hepatitis cases are increasing in Illinois: Timely testing and treatment of viral hepatitis can save lives**

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SPRINGFIELD – In recognition of World Hepatitis Day, July 28, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is encouraging people to talk with a health care provider to see if they should be tested or vaccinated for hepatitis A, B, or C. Viral hepatitis is caused by several different viruses that can infect the liver. Each virus is transmitted differently, though in general, they are highly transmissible through bodily fluids, sexual contact, and contaminated water.

“A person with hepatitis B or C may not show symptoms for years or decades,” said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “According to the World Health Organization, at least 60 percent of liver cancer cases are due to late testing and treatment of viral hepatitis B and C. Timely testing and treatment can save lives, so for World Hepatitis Day this year, find out if you should be tested.”

Viral hepatitis affects millions of people worldwide, causing both acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) liver disease. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates 325 million people worldwide are living with chronic hepatitis B or chronic hepatitis C. Viral hepatitis causes more than one million deaths per year, a number comparable to deaths caused by tuberculosis and HIV combined. While deaths from tuberculosis and HIV have been declining, deaths from hepatitis are increasing. Annually, hepatitis C kills more Americans than any other infectious disease.

In Illinois, the number of reported cases of hepatitis C increased by 43 percent from 6,887 in 2006 to 9,838 in 2017. Many of the cases in individuals younger than 35 years of age have been linked to injection drug use. The rise in hepatitis C cases corresponds with the opioid epidemic in Illinois.

Various blood tests are available to diagnose cases of hepatitis. Factors that increase risk of hepatitis A, B, and C infection include: use of injectable drugs, sexual contact with an infected partner, previous diagnosis of HIV, chronic liver disease, and clotting-factor disorders.

Both hepatitis A and B are preventable with vaccination. Direct treatment for hepatitis A is not currently available, but there is a highly effective vaccine that individuals with risk factors should get. Hepatitis B, similar to hepatitis C, is treatable with prescription antiviral medications.

	<b>Hepatitis A</b>	<b>Hepatitis B</b>	<b>Hepatitis C</b>
Vaccine	Yes	Yes	No
How is it spread?	Hepatitis A is spread when a person ingests fecal matter—even in microscopic amounts—from contact with objects, food, or drinks contaminated by feces or stool from an infected person.	Hepatitis B is primarily spread when blood, semen, or certain other body fluids from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus – even in microscopic amounts – enters the body of someone who is not infected. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Birth to an infected mother</li> <li>- Sex with an infected person</li> <li>- Sharing needles/syringes</li> <li>- Sharing toothbrushes or razors</li> </ul>	Hepatitis C is spread when blood from a person infected with the hepatitis C virus – even in microscopic amounts – enters the body of someone who is not infected. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing equipment that has been contaminated with blood from an infected person, such as needles and syringes.</li> <li>- Sex with an infected person</li> </ul>
Key Facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effective vaccine available.</li> <li>- Outbreaks still occur in the United States.</li> <li>- Recent outbreaks have been seen among individuals who use illegal drugs, and / or who are homeless,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- About 2 in 3 people with hepatitis B do not know they are infected.</li> <li>- Hepatitis B is a leading cause of liver cancer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- About 50% of people with hepatitis C do not know they are infected.</li> <li>- 3 in 4 people with hepatitis C were born from 1945-1965.</li> <li>- There is a rise in recent infections among younger individuals.</li> <li>- Hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver transplants and liver cancer.</li> </ul>
How serious?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- People can be sick for a few weeks to a few months</li> <li>- Most recover with no lasting liver damage</li> <li>- Although very rare, death and liver failure can occur</li> <li>- Those with underlying liver disease or HIV are at risk of more severe disease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The risk for chronic infection depends on age when infected. When infected as an infant, 90% will develop a chronic infection</li> <li>- 15%–25% of chronically infected people develop chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, liver failure, or liver cancer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 75%-85% of people who get infected with the Hepatitis C virus develop a chronic infection</li> <li>- 5%-20% of people with chronic hepatitis C develop cirrhosis</li> <li>- 1%–5% will die from cirrhosis or liver cancer</li> </ul>

\*Chart contains [CDC Information](#)

Take the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [online Hepatitis Risk Assessment](#) to see if you should be tested.

