



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Hepatitis C Rates in Young Adults Increasing in California

SACRAMENTO – New data released today by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) show an increase in newly reported hepatitis C cases among young adults in the state. Between 2007 and 2015, newly reported hepatitis C infections increased 55 percent among men 20-29 years of age and 37 percent among women in the same age group.

These data are consistent with increases in hepatitis C across the country and highlight the importance of hepatitis C testing, treatment, and prevention. Injection drug use among young adults increases their risk of both hepatitis C transmission and infection. Prevention strategies, including access to sterile syringes and safe injection equipment and treatment for opioid use disorders, can reduce the rate of new hepatitis C infections among young people who inject drugs by 60 percent.

“As a physician, I have seen firsthand the deadly effects of hepatitis C,” said CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith. “Patients with advanced liver disease may not know they are infected until it’s too late,” said Dr. Smith. “However, this is preventable. New treatments can cure hepatitis C in as little as two months. I urge people to speak with their doctors about getting tested.”

An estimated 400,000 Californians live with chronic hepatitis C, but many do not know they are infected. Hepatitis C-related deaths now outnumber those due to HIV.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved the use of new treatment for adolescents 12 years and older, raising hopes for teenagers infected with hepatitis C. Although young Californians (ages 20-29) make up an increasing number of newly reported infections, baby boomers account for about one out of two newly reported chronic hepatitis C cases.

“Two groups are top priority for hepatitis C testing – young people who inject drugs and baby boomers,” said Dr. Smith. “Drug users may be at high risk for transmitting hepatitis C to others if they are not being treated, and baby boomers may be at risk for developing serious liver disease, even if they have no symptoms.”

CDPH urges all Californians who have ever injected drugs, even once, and all people born between 1945 and 1965 to talk to their doctors about getting tested for hepatitis C. Patients who test positive should receive care from an experienced provider.

The Department is working to address hepatitis C on multiple fronts, including monitoring hepatitis C trends, producing data reports, educating health care providers on hepatitis C screening and

treatment guidelines, and supporting hepatitis C testing and access to care in settings where at-risk people are served. CDPH also supports coordinated HIV and hepatitis C testing in non-traditional settings, such as mobile health vans. In 2016, about 7,200 people received hepatitis C testing through these programs.

The California Legislature allocated \$2.2 million in July 2015 for three-year pilot projects to help ensure people with hepatitis C are aware of their infections and linked to care. CDPH is working with the following partners on these projects:

- ? AIDS Service Network of San Luis Obispo and Monterey Counties
- ? Butte County Health Department
- ? Family Health Centers of San Diego
- ? San Francisco Department of Public Health
- ? St. John's Well Child and Family Center (serving Central and South Los Angeles and Compton)

For more information about viral hepatitis prevention in California, visit the [CDPH Office of Viral Hepatitis Prevention webpage](#).