

Hepatitis B Disparities in California

- Chronic viral hepatitis B (HBV) and viral hepatitis B (HCV) is a leading cause of cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, and liver cancer in the US and in California.
- Estimated number of chronic hepatitis B infections in California: ~280,000.^{1, 2}
- Chronic HBV infection rates: Caucasians, 0.1%; Latinos, 0.1%; African-Americans, 0.5%; Asian/Pacific Islanders (API), 7.0%.³
- As many as 1 out of 10 API men over 40 are chronically infected with HBV (ranging from 5-15% based on country of origin), compared with 0.1% of Caucasians.³
- Over half of all Californians with chronic HBV are Asian/Pacific Islanders.³
- With the institution of a comprehensive hepatitis B vaccination strategy for children in 1991 in California, the incidence of acute hepatitis B in children declined from 9.8 to 2.4 cases per 100,000.⁴ Currently, California has no adult HBV vaccination program for adults.
- Hepatitis B also disproportionately affects men who have sex with men: about 15%-20% of all new HBV infections in the United States are among men who have sex with men, and HBV vaccination rates are very low among young men who have sex with men.⁵
- There is an effective vaccine to prevent infection with HBV. Although there is no medical cure at this time, early detection and medical management are key to long-term health and survival. Emerging therapies show promise.

Hepatitis C Disparities in California

- Chronic viral hepatitis C is a leading cause of cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, and liver cancer.
- An estimated 600,000 persons in California have been exposed to HCV, with approximately 450,000 chronically infected.⁶
- Prevalence of hepatitis C: Caucasians, 1.5%; Latinos, 2.1%, African Americans, 3.2%.⁶
- African Americans have the highest observed rate of HCV infection among all racial and ethnic groups.^{8, 9}
- 9% of African American men between the ages of 40-49 and 6% of Mexican-Americans between the age of 50-59 have been exposed to hepatitis C.⁶
- The onset of HCV infection occurs at earlier ages in African Americans; therefore, African Americans are infected longer and are more likely to die at an earlier age from hepatitis C.¹⁰
- Hepatitis C-related liver disease is now the leading cause of hospitalizations and death in persons with HIV.¹¹
- Coinfection with HIV enhances the risk of sexual transmission of HCV.¹²
- Although the heterosexual transmission of HCV is relatively uncommon, recent outbreaks of HCV among men who have sex with men suggest that the risk of transmission may be higher in this group.^{13, 14}
- There is no vaccine to prevent infection with HCV; there are, however, effective medical treatments. Early detection and treatment are predictive of long-term cure and survival.

References

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