

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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****ADVISORY – Important Information****

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TO: Epidemiologists, HETL, HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis Program Staff, Local Public Health Liaisons, City and County Health Departments – ALL, Healthcare – ALL, Private laboratories, County EMA Directors, MMA Central Office, OSA Central Office, Community Epidemiology Surveillance Network, Public Health – ALL, Emergency Medical Services, RRCs

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SUBJECT: Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month: Information for Clinicians

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Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month: Information for Clinicians

Background: May is Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month. Viral hepatitis is a leading cause of liver cancer and the most common reason for liver transplantation among adults in the U.S. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 4.4 million Americans are living with chronic hepatitis, and most do not know they are infected.

In Maine, during 2006-2010 an average of 18 cases of acute hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection were reported each year to the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC). However, because most newly infected persons are asymptomatic and because even symptomatic persons are underreported, these statistics markedly underestimate acute HBV infections in Maine. During 2006-2010 an average of 116 confirmed or probable cases of chronic HBV infection were reported in Maine each year, but it is also unknown how many chronic cases are undiagnosed and unreported. By applying national estimates of the prevalence of chronic HBV infection to the Maine population, it can be roughly estimated that approximately 5,000-6,000 Mainers are living with chronic HBV infection.

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is the most common chronic bloodborne infection in the United States. During 2005-2009 an average of approximately 1,300 cases of chronic HCV infection were reported to the Maine CDC each year. Similar to hepatitis B, unrecognized infections and underreporting of diagnosed HCV infections make this an underestimate of the true burden of chronic HCV in the state. By applying national prevalence estimates to the Maine population, it can be roughly estimated that approximately 21,000-26,000 Mainers are living with chronic HCV infection. Without testing for infection, many chronically infected persons are unaware of their infection until symptoms of advanced liver disease appear. Maine CDC is reminding health care providers about the need for screening and vaccination of persons at high risk for viral hepatitis.

Recommendations for Adults:

- **Hepatitis A:** Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for all susceptible adult patients at increased risk for hepatitis A infection or its adverse consequences, including persons in the following groups:
 - Persons traveling to or working in countries that have high or intermediate rates of hepatitis A infection
 - Men who have sex with men
 - Users of illegal injection and noninjection drugs
 - Persons who have occupational risk for infection
 - Persons who have chronic liver disease
 - Persons who have clotting-factor disorders

- **Hepatitis B:** Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for all unvaccinated adults at risk for HBV infection and for all adults requesting protection from HBV infection. Adults at risk for HBV infection include persons in the following groups:
 - Persons whose sex partners have HBV infection

- Sexually-active persons who are not in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship
- Persons seeking evaluation or treatment for a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sex with men
- Persons who share needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Persons with close household contact with someone infected with HBV
- Health care and public safety workers who might be exposed to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids on the job
- Persons with end-stage renal disease, including predialysis, hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, and home dialysis patients
- Residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons
- Travelers to regions with moderate or high rates of HBV infection
- Persons with chronic liver disease
- Persons with HIV infection

For some patients, the combination hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine may be indicated. Pre-vaccination screening for hepatitis B* might be considered to reduce the cost of vaccinating adult populations that have an expected high prevalence. Contacts of acute and chronic hepatitis B patients (including household, sexual, and needle-sharing contacts) may also be tested, and if susceptible, vaccinated against hepatitis B.

- **Hepatitis C:** There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. Hepatitis C testing is recommended for adults at increased risk for HCV infection, including:
- Persons who have ever injected illegal drugs, including those who injected only once many years ago
 - Recipients of clotting factor concentrates made before 1987
 - Recipients of blood transfusions or solid organ transplants before July 1992
 - Patients who have ever received long-term hemodialysis treatment
 - Persons with known exposures to HCV, such as health care workers after needle-sticks involving HCV-positive blood and recipients of blood or organs from a donor who later tested HCV-positive
 - All persons with HIV infection
 - Patients with signs or symptoms of liver disease (e.g., abnormal liver enzyme tests)
 - Persons born to HCV-positive mothers

Chronic HBV and HCV carriers require counseling and medical management to reduce their risk for developing chronic liver disease. Referrals should be made to specialists with experience treating HBV and HCV infections.

Screening tests:

Hepatitis B: Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg), Total Hepatitis B core antibody (anti-HBc), Hepatitis B surface antibody (anti-HBs)

Hepatitis C: Hepatitis C virus antibody (anti-HCV)

Reporting: Health care providers should report all acute cases of viral hepatitis to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821 immediately on recognition or strong suspicion of disease. Cases of chronic hepatitis B or C infection should be reported within 48 hours of recognition or strong suspicion of disease.

For More Information:

- For more information on viral hepatitis visit the federal CDC website at: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis
- Disease reporting or consultation is available by calling Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

*[CDC. Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines, 2010. MMWR 2010; 59\(No. RR-12\).](#)