



CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis: Greater Focus on Hepatitis B Needed

It is estimated that there are up to 2.2 million Americans infected with the hepatitis B virus (HBV), with over 50,000 new infections occurring each year and more than 10 deaths each day as a direct result. Even though there is a hepatitis B vaccine that is over 90% effective, little to no progress has been made in reducing rates of chronic HBV infection in the U.S. Without early diagnosis and intervention, 1 in 4 of those chronically infected with HBV will die prematurely from cirrhosis, liver failure, or liver cancer. **In the face of these facts, the CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis allocates less than 5% of its budget to projects specifically focused on hepatitis B, even though HBV represents more than 35% of the cases of viral hepatitis in the country.**

Hep B United recommends that, based on the National Academies of Sciences' report, "A National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis B and C," the CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis fund a comprehensive hepatitis B elimination plan at the national, state, and local level.

Hepatitis B remains a growing major health threat to this country, and while the rates of acute HBV infection in the U.S. have declined over the past two decades, recent CDC data indicates that acute HBV infection rates have increased almost approximately 114% from 2009 to 2013 in three surveyed states that have high heroin and opioid addicted populations.

Preventing hepatitis B infections can help prevent primary liver cancer, which has a 5-year survival rate of less than 15%. Primary liver cancer is the 2nd leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide. In the U.S., the incidence of liver cancer is increasing while most other cancer rates continue to decline or stabilize.

The Division of Viral Hepatitis spends less than 5% on HBV focused projects, despite hepatitis B infected patients comprising more than 35% of all those infected with viral hepatitis. Furthermore, tremendous HBV-related health disparities exist for people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent and recent African immigrants. These groups represent less than 5% of the U.S. population but make up more than 50% of the U.S. burden of chronic HBV infection. CDC has not adequately addressed the issue of chronic HBV infections among high-risk, foreign-born populations and their children.

Despite the availability of a hepatitis B vaccine that is more than 90% effective, there are over 50,000 new infections occurring each year and more than 10 deaths each day due to hepatitis B. Also, as a result of the opioid epidemic, HBV infection has spiked in many parts of the nation. For example, acute hepatitis B infections increased 114% from 2006 to 2013 in Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia—three states that have suffered from widespread opioid overuse. Furthermore, the link between hepatitis B infection and primary liver cancer is well established with up to 60% of global liver cancer cases caused by HBV. Many of these liver cancer cases are preventable with early detection, treatment, and vaccination. The findings of two recent National Academy of Sciences reports that the virus could be totally eliminated, and yet the Division allocates less than 5% of its budget to projects specifically focused on hepatitis B.

Hep B United strongly urges that the CDC develop an action plan to implement the Academies' recommendations with adequate funding to execute a comprehensive HBV elimination public health initiative at the national, state and local levels.