Hepatitis C

Testing baby boomers saves lives

Hepatitis C is a serious virus infection that over time can cause liver damage and even liver cancer. Early treatment can prevent this damage. Too many people with hepatitis C do not know they are infected, so they don’t get the medical care they need.

Once infected with the hepatitis C virus, nearly 8 in 10 people remain infected for life. A simple blood test, called a hepatitis C antibody test, can tell if you have ever been infected, but cannot tell whether you are still infected. Only a different follow-up blood test can determine if you are still infected. Too many people with hepatitis C do not know they are infected, so they don’t get the medical care they need.

Baby boomers (people born from 1945 through 1965) can:

◊ Ask your doctor, nurse, or other health care provider for a hepatitis C blood test.

◊ Encourage family and friends born from 1945 through 1965 to get tested for hepatitis C.

Doctors, nurses and other health care providers can:

◊ Test all baby boomers and people with other risks for hepatitis C.

◊ Make sure everyone who tests positive on the first test gets the follow-up test to find out if they are still infected.

About 3 million adults in the US are infected with the hepatitis C virus, most are baby boomers.

Up to 3 in 4 people who are infected don’t know they have hepatitis C so they aren’t getting the necessary medical care.

Baby boomers, anyone born from 1945 through 1965, should get tested for hepatitis C.

National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention
Division of Viral Hepatitis
Anyone can get hepatitis C, but adults born from 1945 through 1965 are 5 times more likely to have hepatitis C.

◊ Hepatitis C is mostly spread through contact with an infected person’s blood.

◊ Some people could have gotten infected before widespread screening of blood began in 1992.

◊ People who have injected drugs, even if only once in the past, could have been infected with the virus from sharing a needle or drug equipment with someone who had hepatitis C.

◊ Many people do not know how or when they were infected.

Hepatitis C causes serious liver disease, even liver cancer.

◊ Most people with hepatitis C don’t have any symptoms. If symptoms do appear, they can be a sign of serious liver damage.

◊ Hepatitis C can cause liver scarring and liver failure if left untreated.

◊ Hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver cancer.

◊ Successful treatment can get rid of hepatitis C from the body

Blood tests are needed to tell if you have hepatitis C.

◊ A screening blood test, called an antibody test, shows if a person has ever been infected with the hepatitis C virus.

◊ If the antibody test is positive, a follow-up RNA blood test is needed to see if a person is still infected with the hepatitis C virus.

◊ A CDC study shows through health department reports that only 50% of adults who had a positive antibody test had a follow-up test reported. Without a follow-up test, people won’t know if they are still infected with the hepatitis C virus.

People Who Should be Tested

• Born from 1945 through 1965
• Have received blood products with clotting factor before 1987
• Have received blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
• Have ever injected drugs, even if only one time
• Have HIV
• Have been on kidney dialysis for several years
• Are health or public safety workers who have been stuck with a needle or other sharp object with blood from a person with hepatitis C or unknown hepatitis C status
• Born to mother with hepatitis C

Test Patients Born from 1945 through 1965 for Hepatitis C

**Ask to be tested**

Baby boomers
Born from 1945 through 1965

- **Negative** -
  - No hepatitis C virus infection

- **Positive** -
  - Follow-up RNA blood test for hepatitis C virus infection
    - Refer for further evaluation
    - Connect to medical care
  - No further action needed

**Test patients**

Doctors, nurses, and other health care providers

- **Negative** -
  - No hepatitis C virus infection

- **Positive** -
  - No further action needed

SOURCE: CDC updated guidance, 2013
What Can Be Done

US government is


◊ Funding programs that support hepatitis C testing and getting people linked to care and treatment.

◊ Educating doctors, nurses, and other health care providers about hepatitis C, developing clinical tools and issuing updated guidance to help carry out recommended testing.

◊ Working with states and communities to improve reporting of hepatitis C test results in order to get people needed services.

◊ Increasing coverage under the Affordable Care Act so more people will have health insurance for testing and treatment.

State and local public health departments can

◊ Let people know where they can get blood tests for hepatitis C.

◊ Follow-up with health care providers and laboratories for people who have a positive hepatitis C antibody test but have no record of a follow-up test.

◊ Monitor and report people with hepatitis C infection and promote best practices for testing and linking patients to care.

Doctors, nurses, and other health care providers can

◊ Set up systems to make to make sure all patients born from 1945 through 1965 are tested for hepatitis C.

◊ Test patients with other risks for hepatitis C, including blood transfusions before 1992 or injection drug use.

◊ Make sure everyone who has a positive hepatitis C antibody test gets the follow-up blood RNA test and is linked to lifesaving care and treatment if infected.

Baby boomers and all persons at risk can

◊ Ask their doctor, nurse, or other health care provider about getting tested for hepatitis C.

◊ Make sure to get a follow-up test if the antibody test is positive to see if they are still infected with the hepatitis C virus.


People living with hepatitis C can

◊ Eat a healthy diet, stay physically active, see a doctor on a regular basis and ask if you could benefit from new and better treatments.

◊ Talk to your doctor before taking over the counter medicines and avoid alcohol because they can cause liver damage.

◊ Reduce the risk of transmission to others by not donating blood or sharing personal items that might come into contact with blood.

For more information, please contact
Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)
TTY: 1-888-232-6348
E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov
Web: www.cdc.gov
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333
Publication date: 5/7/2013