



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants

Date: December 20, 2021

From: Public Health Services

Health Advisory: US Preventive Services Task Force Recommends Screening All Adults under Age 80 for Hepatitis C

Key Messages

- The US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) now recommends screening all adults, aged 18 to 79 years, including those who are pregnant, at least once for HCV, regardless of risk factors (Grade B recommendation).
- Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is increasing among people who use injected drugs, especially young people, while treatments have become shorter and safer.
- With the passage of [AB 789](#) in early October 2021, offering hepatitis B and C screening at least once for all adults is now required in primary care settings in California, with some exceptions.
- The local *Eliminate Hepatitis C San Diego County Initiative* is an effort to reduce new HCV infections by 80% and deaths by 65% by 2030. Screening is one of the nine recommendations of the *Initiative* to enable San Diego County to achieve these benchmarks. This best practice aligns with USPSTF and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations.
- Consider screening teenagers who are pregnant and anyone with a history of injection drug use.

Situation

In March 2020, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) expanded its hepatitis C virus (HCV) screening recommendation to include one-time screening for all adults aged 18 to 79 years, regardless of risk factors (recommendation grade B). Previously, USPSTF had recommended routine one-time screening for adults born between 1945 and 1965, as well as screening of persons at high risk for infection. The update was based on the increase in acute HCV infection in younger persons, increased evidence on the benefit of treatment in older adults, and improved treatment regimens with lower risk of adverse events than older interferon-containing therapies.

While one-time screening is recommended for most adults, periodic screening is recommended for adults with risk factors. The primary risk factor for HCV acquisition is past or current injection drug use (IDU). Adolescents younger than 18 years and adults older than 79 years with past or current IDU should also be screened. Pregnant adults should be screened due to the risk of vertical transmission, and clinicians may want to consider screening pregnant persons younger than 18 years of age.

On October 4, 2021, Assembly Bill 789 (AB 789) added Section 1316.7 to the California Health and Safety Code, requiring voluntary screening for hepatitis B and C in primary care settings. AB 789 states that adults seeking primary care for non-emergency situations should be offered screening, unless they have already had or been offered a screening test, their insurance does not cover the test, or they lack capacity to consent. In the event of a positive test, provision of follow-up health care directly or by referral is also a requirement.

Background

HCV remains the most common chronic blood-borne pathogen in the US and is associated with more deaths than the top 60 other reportable infectious diseases combined, including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The estimated

prevalence of chronic HCV infection is 1%; acute HCV increased nearly four-fold during 2010 – 2017 due to increasing IDU and improved surveillance. The most rapid increases were in young adults aged 20 to 39 years who inject drugs.

In San Diego County, 76 cases of acute HCV infection were reported in 2019, and 4,310 chronic HCV cases were newly reported. While COVID-19 impacted preventive care access and disease investigation in 2020 and 2021, 27 acute and 3,860 chronic HCV cases were reported in 2020, while 18 acute and 2,422 chronic cases have been reported so far in 2021. These data cannot be readily compared with data from previous years because case investigation and reporting expanded substantially during 2017–2020. However, during 2015–2017, approximately 3,000 chronic cases and <5 acute cases of HCV were reported each year.

Most chronic HCV cases reported to the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency during 2018–2020 were aged 25–44 or 45–64 years. Cases were reported in both men and women, with nearly twice as many cases reported among men than among women. An average of approximately 60 (range 38–77) San Diego County residents died of chronic HCV each year during 2015–2020.

The *Eliminate Hepatitis C San Diego County Initiative* was approved by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors in November 2018 and is an effort to reduce new HCV infections by 80% and deaths by 65% by 2030. Screening for HCV infection that is in line with USPSTF and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations and best practices is one of the nine recommendations of the *Eliminate Hepatitis C San Diego County Initiative* to enable San Diego County to achieve these goals.

Actions Requested

1. Screen every adult under the age of 80 years (including pregnant women) for HCV at least once.
2. Consider HCV screening for:
 - Pregnant persons under 18 years of age.
 - Persons who have used injection drugs that are either < 18 or ≥ 80 years of age.
3. Periodically screen persons with continued vulnerability to HCV infection (e.g., persons with past or current IDU).
4. Counsel patients on HCV risk reduction through condom use and avoidance of needle sharing.
5. When adults accept the offer of the hepatitis screening and the test is positive, offer or refer for follow-up health care.

Resources

- [Hepatitis C Virus Infection in Adolescents and Adults: Screening \(uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org\)](https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org)
- [Hepatitis C - FAQs, Statistics, Data, & Guidelines | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/c/faq-statistics-data-guidelines)
- [Hepatitis C Patient Education Resources | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/c/patient-education-resources)
- [Liver Disease Communities. Liver Disease Stories - ALF \(liverfoundation.org\)](https://www.liverfoundation.org/liver-disease-communities)
- [Bill Text - AB-789 Health care services](#)
- [Office of Viral Hepatitis Prevention \(ca.gov\)](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Imz/Pages/Viral-Hepatitis-Prevention)
- [Hepatitis C Fact Sheet \(sandiegocounty.gov\)](https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/health/human-services/epidemiology-immunization-services-branch/hepatitis-c)
- [Syringe Services Program \(SSP\) | Services and Programs \(fhcsd.org\)](https://www.fhcsd.org/services-and-programs)

Thank you for your participation.

CAHAN San Diego

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