



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

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For Immediate Release: 05.18.17

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EXPANDED TESTING NECESSARY TO ELIMINATE VIRAL HEPATITIS IN THE UNITED STATES

The AIDS Institute Recognizes National Hepatitis Testing Day

Washington, DC – “As we recognize [National Hepatitis Testing Day](#) on May 19th, The AIDS Institute reminds people to get tested for hepatitis B and C, as testing is an important first step to eliminating viral hepatitis in the United States. Without testing, people with hepatitis cannot be linked to care and treatment, and in the instance of hepatitis C, cured,” said Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute.

There are an estimated 1.4 million people in the United States living with hepatitis B (HBV) and 3.9 million living with hepatitis C (HCV), yet more than half of them are unaware of their infection.

To help increase HCV testing, The AIDS Institute released an updated [Coverage Guide for Hepatitis C Testing](#), which explains how HCV testing can be paid for by private insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid. Under the Affordable Care Act, millions of people have gained access to health coverage including preventive services, such as HBV and HCV testing.

While new cases and deaths due to viral hepatitis have been on the rise, several recent reports have outlined how viral hepatitis can be eliminated as a public health threat. The Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Division of Viral Hepatitis (DVH), the [National Academies](#), the Department of Health and Human Services, and the World Health Organization have all issued reports and strategies outlining ways to decrease or eliminate hepatitis. One common theme in all of them is the need for increased testing and increased resources.

“We can't begin to eliminate viral hepatitis in the U.S. until we dramatically increase our investment, starting with testing,” commented Frank Hood, Policy Associate for The AIDS Institute. “The AIDS Institute urges Congress to increase funding for CDC's Viral Hepatitis

programs to at least \$70 million in FY2018, up from the current funding level of \$34 million.”

The CDC and the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends all persons at high risk for infection be periodically tested for HBV and HCV, and all baby boomers (those born between 1945-1965) have a one-time test for HCV, among other recommendations.

Left untreated, viral hepatitis can cause liver damage, cirrhosis, and is a leading cause of liver cancer. Every year, nearly 20,000 people in the United States die from viral hepatitis and its complications. HCV-associated deaths now exceed the number of deaths from 60 other nationally notifiable diseases combined. Over five years, the number of new HCV cases has nearly tripled, fueled mainly by increases in opioid use, reaching a 15-year high. However, the CDC estimates that one-time HCV testing for baby boomers could identify 800,000 infections and, with linkage to care and treatment, avert more than 120,000 HCV-related deaths.

“Treating and eliminating viral hepatitis in the United States starts with testing, but more resources are needed,” said Michael Ruppel, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “With the number of cases and deaths from viral hepatitis continuing to skyrocket, it is time for Congress to act, and increase funding for the CDC’s Viral Hepatitis programs.”

To access The AIDS Institute's updated Coverage Guide for Hepatitis C Testing, go to: <http://bit.ly/2qyquuw>

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The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy, research, advocacy and education.

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