Boomers Get an F for Hep C Testing

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Baby boomers do not appear to be getting the message about hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing. Although federal guidelines recommend that all those born between 1945 and 1965 be screened for the virus, a recent study estimated that only about 13 percent of the birth cohort has done so.

An estimated more than three quarters of those living with HCV in the United States are baby boomers. Perhaps 1 in 30 members of this generation have the virus.

Researchers analyzed hep C testing patterns from the 2013 to 2015 National Health Interview Survey data among 85,000 members of four birth cohorts: those born before 1945, between 1945 and 1965, between 1966 and 1985, and after 1985.

The researchers found that in all birth cohorts, females were less likely to get tested for hep C than males. Among baby boomers and those born between 1966 and 1985, HCV testing rates were lower among Latinos and Blacks compared with whites.

The proportion of baby boomer survey respondents who said they had been tested for HCV ranged from 11.9 percent in 2013 to 12.8 percent in 2015. Less than one in five of the baby boomers who got tested for the virus reported that they were prompted to do so because they were born between 1945 and 1965.

“Screening and treating baby boomers is a critical step toward reducing the burden of disease caused by untreated HCV infection,” says the study’s lead author, Susan T. Vadaparampil, PhD, MPH, of the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida. “Getting more providers to be aware of and comfortable with routinely screening baby boomers is critical. It’s also important for our public health community to educate baby boomers to know about and ask for HCV screening.”

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