CDC Releases New Recommendations for Hepatitis B Screening and Vaccination

November 30, 2017

Last week the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American College of Physicians (ACP) released new recommendations for hepatitis B virus screening, vaccination and care in the United States. The paper, which was recently published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, argues that HBV should be a national public health priority and calls for a major ramp-up of vaccinations across the country, Medical Xpress reports.

Moving forward, ACP and the CDC are advising American doctors to inoculate all adults who have not been vaccinated against hepatitis B, including pregnant women, health care and public safety workers, adults with chronic liver disease, people living with HIV, travelers to HBV-endemic regions and anyone who asks for it.

According to the public health analysts who authored the report, the majority of American adults at risk for or infected with hepatitis B across the country are still not getting screened, vaccinated or linked to care. In fact, it is estimated that two out of three people chronically infected with HBV in this country are currently unaware of their infection.

ACP and the CDC are also advising physicians to screen for HBV among certain high-risk groups, including people born in countries with a 2 percent or higher hepatitis B prevalence (including many countries in Asia and Africa), men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, people living with hepatitis C virus (HCV), incarcerated people and people with end-stage renal disease.

In addition, the new guidelines advise doctors to provide or refer all patients who test positive for hepatitis B to post-test counseling and hepatitis B–specific care. Those who test positive for HBV should also be routinely evaluated through their medical history and regular physical exams for hepatocellular carcinoma, the most common form of HBV-related liver cancer, as well as their eligibility for hepatitis B treatment.

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