CDC Report: State Laws Mandating Hepatitis C Screening Are Effective

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State laws that mandate health care providers to offer hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing can help significantly increase screening rates and linkage to care among those newly diagnosed with the liver virus, according to new research published in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

The report, which was recently summarized by reporters at Medical Xpress, used New York state as a case study for testing mandates, noting that in 2014, New York legislators enacted a law requiring that health care providers offer HCV antibody screening to all their patients born between 1945 and 1965, currently one of the most at-risk groups in the country for an undiagnosed infection.

Researchers then looked at survey data from clinical laboratories, state Medicaid claims and patient encounter data as well as New York's hepatitis C surveillance statistics over several years to see whether the new law had any effect on the rate of testing and linkage to care for the virus.

The researchers ended up observing a 51 percent increase in blood specimens submitted for HCV testing during the first year of the law's implementation. Among Medicaid users, screening rates went up by 52 percent. The study also noted that linkage to care among people with newly diagnosed hepatitis C went up by approximately 40 percent in the state of New York and 11 percent in New York City — a significant increase for all tested parameters.

Study authors concluded that New York's results verify how state laws and legislation around hepatitis C screening can help with efforts to link people to treatment and, eventually, end the HCV epidemic. Researchers also noted the importance of keeping accurate HCV surveillance data and Medicaid claims in order to monitor the quality of testing and linkage to care strategies across the country.

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