Connecticut Group Advocates for Better Liver Health Awareness

Experts developed 20 recommendations to improve MASLD/MASH awareness, screening and care.

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To combat increasing rates of liver disease a working group established by the Connecticut General Assembly developed several recommendations to boost awareness, and access to care for residents living with or at risk of liver disease in the state, according to a Yale School of Medicine news release.

More than one third of residents in Connecticut have metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) or its more severe form, metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH), according to the working group. What's more, the greatest increase in MASH incidence is occurring in adults ages 18 to 39.

"The dramatic rise of MASLD and MASH in Connecticut and across the country is alarming," said Wajahat Mehal, MD, DPhil, a professor of medicine at Yale and the working group's chair, in the release. "It is especially concerning because our numbers only include those who have a formal diagnosis. Many other people across the state have the disease but are not receiving diagnosis, treatment or surveillance."

Often referred to as "silent diseases," MASLD (formerly known as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, or NAFLD) and MASH (formerly known as non-alcoholic steatohepatitis, or NASH) are responsible for a growing proportion of advanced liver disease, mirroring a global rise in obesity.

MASLD can lead to liver fibrosis, severe scarring known as cirrhosis and even liver cancer. With no effective approved medical therapies, management depends on lifestyle changes such as weight loss and exercise.

MASH, which causes swelling in the liver, affects between a quarter and a third of people in the

United States, and it's estimated that rates of MASH are highest among Latinos.

When left untreated, MASH can lead to cirrhosis as well as long-term liver damage that can advance to liver failure. Because there aren't many symptoms associated with the condition, it can be difficult for patients to know they have it. Raising awareness is essential to getting patients the care they need to stave off progression. To that end, the working group developed 20 recommendations, including the establishment of an annual Connecticut Liver Health Day.

The group also suggested developing outreach programs targeting key audiences and stakeholders, including primary care providers, pediatricians, teachers and students, community health workers and community organizations in Latino communities.

According to the release, the group also recommends:

- Establishing new systems to screen people at high risk of MASH, including through electronic health records and noninvasive ultrasound technology in high-risk areas;
- Highlighting several key points during educational efforts, including the role of moderate alcohol intake in increasing the likelihood and severity of liver disease;
- Including chronic liver disease in the State Health Dashboard to provide visibility and awareness of the rise in prevalence of the disease.

The working group shared these recommendations with the Connecticut General Assembly Public Health Committee for consideration.

"With better education and screening, we can work together to bring down rates of MASLD and MASH within Connecticut and improve the health of our population—particularly the Latinx population, which is more significantly affected by these conditions," said Jorge Moreno, MD, a member of the panel and an assistant professor of medicine at Yale.

To learn more, click #MASLD or #MASH. There, you'll see headlines such as "What Is Fatty Liver Disease? (MASLD and MASH)," "FDA Approves First-Ever Drug for Fatty Liver Disease" and "Scientists Identify Three Types of Fatty Liver Disease."

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