Hepatitis B Campaign Targets Korean Churches in Los Angeles

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Researchers at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health recently partnered with 52 Korean churches in the Los Angeles area to help raise awareness and testing for the hepatitis B virus (HBV), Health Canal reports.

The outreach effort was part of a new study, which helped train dozens of bilingual Korean community members to administer surveys and facilitate group discussions among their church congregations about hep B, liver cancer and the importance of testing for the disease.

UCLA reached out specifically to this community because Koreans in the United States are considered to be at a huge risk for HBV. An estimated 12 percent of the Korean-American population is thought to be have the liver disease—and the majority of them are unaware they have it. Korean Americans also reportedly have the highest rates of liver cancer among any ethnic group in Los Angeles.

Participants in the Korean church study's intervention group, who were informed of these risks, ended up being three times more likely to get a hep B test than their control group counterparts.

The project also identified a number of factors that are preventing many Koreans from getting tested for HBV, such as fears about the consequences of learning their status and the potential of bringing shame to their families, and the fact that the majority (57 percent) of participants did not have health insurance.

Researchers assured participants that hep B is common in Asian countries, and is especially prevalent among newer immigrants who may not have been vaccinated for the disease within the past two decades.

HBV can be spread through sexual contact, sharing needles, mother-to-child transmission and through household items such as razors and toothbrushes.

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