Hep C Is Globe’s Biggest Infectious Disease Killer

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Hepatitis C virus (HCV) now kills more Americans than any other infectious disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hep C–related deaths reached an all-time high of 19,659 in 2014.

Additionally, in 2013, hep C–related deaths were greater than the combined total of deaths related to 60 other major infectious diseases reportable to the agency, including HIV, pneumococcal disease and tuberculosis.

Because the researchers based these estimates on death certificates, and hep C is often under-reported on those documents, these are likely underestimates.

“Many baby boomers have unknowingly lived with hepatitis C for decades, and the virus is taking a toll on their health,” says Scott Holmberg, MD, MPH, chief of the epidemiology and surveillance branch of the CDC’s Division of Viral Hepatitis and coauthor of the article. “I cannot stress enough the importance of ensuring people with hepatitis C know their status. It’s the first step toward treatment and cure, and it’s the only way we can expect to see a day when no one dies of the virus.”

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