Hep C-Related Liver Disease Differs by Race

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If you have hep C virus (HCV), your likelihood of developing cirrhosis or liver cancer may be linked to your race. To determine this connection, researchers examined Veterans Administration records of those confirmed to have hep C between 2000 and 2009; they also looked at cases of liver cancer and cirrhosis among the HCV-positive population through early 2010.

During an average 5.2 years of follow-up care, 13,000 out of 150,000 people with hep C developed cirrhosis and 3,500 of the total were diagnosed with liver cancer. The respective rates of cirrhosis and liver cancer per 100 person-years among the three racial groups were as follows: Latinos, 28.8 and 7.8; whites, 21.6 and 4.7; and African Americans, 13.3 and 3.9.

After adjusting for various factors, researchers found that Latinos had a 28 percent greater risk of cirrhosis and a 61 percent greater risk of liver cancer when compared with whites. Meanwhile, African Americans had a 42 percent reduced risk of cirrhosis and a 23 percent reduced risk of liver cancer compared with whites.

Hashem B. El-Serag, MD, MPH, the chief of gastroenterology and hepatology at both Baylor College of Medicine and the VA Medical Center in Houston, says that genetic differences as well as differences in obesity and insulin resistance may help explain the varying levels of risk according to race. “Studies have shown a much higher incidence of obesity, particularly abdominal obesity, among [Latinos],” he says.

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