# Minnesota Prisoners Now Have Access to Hepatitis C Treatment

The right was secured via a class-action lawsuit settlement.

March 20, 2019 By Casey Halter

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Minnesota prisoners living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) must be provided access to direct-acting antiviral treatment for the virus, thanks to a class-action lawsuit settlement, the Star Tribune reports.

Filed by five HCV-positive inmates against the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) in 2015, the lawsuit accused the agency of denying the prisoners the medications—which boast a 95 percent cure rate—for years. According to their lawyers, that violated their constitutional rights as prisoners (by law, inmates must be provided adequate medical care while incarcerated.

Under the terms of the settlement, the DOC must screen all prisoners for hepatitis C. Antiviral drugs must be provided if the inmate has an advanced stage of the disease or other complications, such as another viral infection, diabetes or a liver transplant. An inmate denied treatment can request a reevaluation every six months; additionally, under the ruling, any inmate with the virus will get treatment after 16 months' imprisonment

None of the prisoners who filed the lawsuit were awarded any money as part of the settlement, although the DOC must reimburse their attorneys. That, and pay for the cost of treatment moving forward, which the DOC said could "result in a fundamental alteration to the DOC or its programming," noting that treatment ranges in cost from $26,400 to more than $100,000 per patient.

The Minnesota lawsuit is one in a series across the country that have demanded that prisoners be able to access hepatitis C treatment, no matter the cost, arguing that many prison treatment guidelines are at odds with the standard of care for various illnesses, including hep C . Many of these lawsuits have ended in settlements similar to this one, including cases in Tennessee, North Carolina and Colorado.

To learn more about hepatitis treatment access in prisons, click here.

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