New National Plan to End Viral Hepatitis

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The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently released the Viral Hepatitis National Strategic Plan for the United States: A Roadmap to Elimination 2021–2025.

HHS estimates that as of 2016, nearly 3.3 million people in the United States were living with chronic viral hepatitis—862,000 with hepatitis B and 2.4 million with hepatitis C. HHS data from 2014 to 2018 in the United States show that the rate of new hepatitis A cases increased by 850%; the rate of acute hepatitis B cases increased by 11%; and the rate of acute hepatitis C cases increased by 71%.

Building on three similar plans from the past decade, the updated 72-page hepatitis strategy focuses on the three most common of the five hepatitis viruses: hepatitis A, B and C viruses, also referred to as HAV, HBV and HCV.

The plan lists five main goals for the next five years:

- Prevent new viral hepatitis infections;
- Improve viral hepatitis–related health outcomes of people with viral hepatitis;
- Reduce viral hepatitis–related disparities and health inequities;
- Improve viral hepatitis surveillance and data use;
- Achieve integrated, coordinated efforts that address the viral hepatitis epidemics among all partners and stakeholders.

“The human and economic consequences of viral hepatitis epidemics are steep. Viral hepatitis is a public health threat that puts people who are infected at increased risk for liver disease, cancer and death, affects the quality of life for millions of Americans and costs the health care system billions of dollars annually,” said Admiral Brett P. Giroir, MD, assistant secretary for health, in an HHS press release. “The nation is losing ground in the fight against viral hepatitis despite safe and effective hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines, and a hepatitis C cure that works after an eight-week course of medicine.”

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