North Carolina Prisons to Boost Hepatitis C Screenings and Treatment

A settlement reached in a class-action lawsuit ensures inmates in North Carolina prisons get improved hepatitis C care.

March 11, 2021 By Trent Straube

Innmates in North Carolina state prisons will have better access to screenings and treatment for hepatitis C, a communicable liver disease that can be fatal and is more prevalent among prison populations. The improved standard of care is the result of a settlement class-action lawsuit filed in March 2019.

According to a statement from the N.C. Department of Public Safety, state prisons will now:

- Increase screenings for the hepatitis C virus;
- Use new classes of medicine to treat more than 2,000 offenders;
- Boost hepatitis C education and awareness programs;
- Arrange post-release treatment for inmates diagnosed near their release dates;
- Report every six months on numbers of offenders tested and treated.

As soon as the state prison systems return to normal operating procedures following the COVID-19 pandemic, prisoners living with hepatitis C will be treated within the next five years.

Under the state's previous policy, inmates with hep C had to wait for liver scarring to advance before they could receive treatment. But the standard of care for hep C changed radically with the advent of effective treatment from antiviral drugs in 2013. Most hep C cases can be treated with a daily tablet taken for a number of weeks.

The lawsuit argued that the state's policy of denying treatment until the disease progressed violated the Americans With Disabilities Act as well as the Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment, reports the Charlotte Observer.

Hepatitis C virus affects the liver. Over time, it can cause fibrosis (mild to moderate liver scarring), cirrhosis (serious liver scarring), liver cancer, liver failure and death. Hepatitis C is most commonly transmitted through direct blood-to-blood contact, such as by sharing needles and drug paraphernalia; through blood transfusions and organ transplants; through tattoos and, in rarer cases, via sex.

A report from the National Hepatitis Corrections Network offers data on hep C in U.S. prison populations:

- The prevalence of hepatitis C in U.S. prisons is between 12% and 35%;
- Correctional population represents one third of US HCV population;
- 90% of prisoners will be released;
- 20% to 55% of prisoners report injection drug use.

The original federal lawsuit was filed in 2018 on behalf of three people with hepatitis C. A year later, it became a class-action lawsuit affecting up to 12,500 people incarcerated in North Carolina. The lawsuit was led by North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina and other civil rights groups.

North Carolina isn't the only state improving hepatitis C treatments among prisoners. For example, see "Nevada Budgets $6M to Treat All Prisoners Who Have Hepatitis C."

Click here to learn the Basics of Hepatitis C. And for more about viral hepatitis and other forms of liver disease such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), see our Introduction to Hepatitis.

[[poll|583]]

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/north-carolina-prisons-boost-hepatitis-c-screenings-treatment