Why Can’t Pharmacists in New York State Give Hepatitis Vaccinations? [VIDEO]

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New York is the only state in the nation that doesn’t allow pharmacists to administer vaccines to prevent hepatitis A and B. What’s more, the state is one of two that prohibit pharmacists from giving vaccinations for chickenpox, measles and human papillomavirus (HPV, a type of infection that causes warts and can cause cancer).

A group of health experts hopes to change the Empire State’s low standing on this issue. As News10 ABC reports, health experts representing at least 20 groups are promoting legislation that’ll allow pharmacists to administer vaccines approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for people older than 18.

“Unfortunately, when it comes to access to vaccines at pharmacies, New York is dead last at this point,” Julie Hart, the government relations director for the American Cancer Society, told News10. “This is really disappointing because, for a lot of people, their trusted health care source right now is a pharmacy.”

And as the COVID-19 pandemic is proving, New York’s pharmacists are more than capable of administering vaccinations—they have been permitted to give COVID-19 vaccines and long before the pandemic they’ve been allowed to offer flu shots.

More than 90% of Americans live within five miles of a community pharmacy, according to the CDC’s Get to Know Your Pharmacist webpage, which adds, “An important member of your health care team is as close as your local drugstore.… Your pharmacist may be the health professional you see most often and talk with about your health.”

The group of health experts advocating for changing New York laws recently met virtually to urge legislators to take action on this preventive health measure. Participants, News10 reports, included the American Cancer Society, NAACP New York State Conference, New York State

Association of County Health Organizations and the New York Public Health Association.

Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by:

- Toxins and chemicals such as excessive amounts of alcohol
- Autoimmune diseases that cause the immune system to attack healthy tissues in the body
- Fat, which may cause fatty liver disease
- Microorganisms, including viruses.

Vaccines are available for hepatitis A and hep B but not for hep C. As HepMag.com's Introduction to Hepatitis points out:

Hepatitis A virus (HAV), hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infect liver cells called hepatocytes, which provide the best conditions for these viruses to reproduce. In response to the infection, the body's immune system targets the liver, causing inflammation (hepatitis). If the hepatitis is severe (which can happen with HAV and HBV) or goes on for a long period of time (which can happen with HBV and HCV), hardened fibers can develop in the liver, a condition called fibrosis.

Over time, more and more normal liver tissue can be replaced by hardened scar tissue, which can obstruct the normal flow of blood through the liver and seriously affect its structure and ability to function properly.

In related news, see "How's New York State Doing in Its Efforts to Eliminate Hepatitis C?" (The answer is not so great, and the situation can't be blamed solely on setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic.)

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