Report Highlights Hepatitis Incidence in Philadelphia

More than 48,000 residents are living with hepatitis B, C or D, according to a Philadelphia Department of Public Health report.

February 10, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

A Philadelphia Department of Public Health report found cases of hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) in all of the city's ZIP codes, underscoring the need for increased awareness and resources to test, prevent and treat the liver infection, according to a City of Philadelphia news release, reports Metro Philadelphia.

The 2023 Annual Report on Hepatitis B, C, and D found that more than 48,000 Philadelphia residents are living with these viruses, although due to a lack of symptoms and routine testing, this number may be higher. Health care officials encourage all adults to get tested for HBV and HCV at least once in their lifetime.

"This report highlights the continued progress toward eliminating hepatitis B, C, and D from Philadelphia," said health commissioner Palak Raval-Nelson, PhD, MPH, in the release. "Much work remains, however, and by coordinating efforts across Philadelphia, we can eliminate the impact they have on the health of our residents."

HBV is a highly contagious viral infection that can cause liver damage, liver cancer and premature death if left untreated. HBV is easily spread via HBV-positive blood or semen or other body fluids.

In 2023, about 1.6% of Philadelphians had HBV, and 666 people were newly diagnosed, according to the report. Non-Hispanic Black residents represented the highest proportion of cases. Asian and Pacific Islanders experienced almost 10 times the rate of infection of white residents.

Although there is no cure for HBV, treatment can help prevent cirrhosis, liver failure and cancer by halting HBV replication and reducing viral load. Many medications that aim to cure HBV are under study. Health officials urge all adults to get vaccinated against hepatitis B to prevent infection.

While there is no vaccine for HCV, it is curable with a relatively short course of direct-acting antivirals in the vast majority of cases. The blood-borne virus can cause lifelong infection, liver fibrosis, cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure and death. Some 144 new HCV cases were diagnosed in Philadelphia in 2023.

Of the more than 51,000 Philadelphians who have been diagnosed with HCV since 2016, half have been cured of or have cleared the virus, according to the report. Nevertheless, health officials emphasize that access to treatment and support services for Philadelphians with HCV must be expanded.

This is the city's first report to include insights on hepatitis D (HDV), which occurs only in people living with HBV. The report found that Philadelphians with HDV are more likely to be men, non-Hispanic Black or between 45 and 64 years old. In 2023, 10 people in Philadelphia were diagnosed with HDV.

For the full report, click here.

To read more, click #Hepatitis B or #Hepatitis C. There, you'll find headlines such as "DHHS Updates Hepatitis B Guidelines for People With HIV," "Encouraging HIV and Viral Hepatitis Testing in Substance Use Disorder Treatment" and "Fentanyl Use Tied to Higher Risk for Hepatitis C."

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