San Francisco Completes First Estimate of Its Hepatitis C Epidemic

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The first-ever estimate of San Francisco's hepatitis C virus (HCV) epidemic reports that nearly 13,000 of the city's residents are currently infected with the viral liver disease, according to a recent press release by Project Inform.

The new report, which was published by local advocacy group End Hep C SF, was compiled using the data of a consortium of doctors, public health experts and community members working to eliminate the disease across the city. The research group was formed last year by the San Francisco Department of Health, the University of California, San Francisco and more than 30 community partners to help ramp up local HCV-related efforts.

Other findings in the report show approximately 23,000 residents of San Francisco also test positive for HCV-positive antibodies, signifying that nearly 3 percent of the city's population has at some point been exposed to the virus. Of those, at least 4,500 people have reportedly cured their infections with new hepatitis C treatments, while public health experts say many others may have cleared the virus naturally.

End Hep C SF's study also estimates nearly 70 percent of people infected with hepatitis C in the city are injection drug users, despite making up less than 3 percent of San Francisco's total population. Nearly 13 percent of those infected are men who have sex with men (MSM), and almost three fourths of MSM infected with hepatitis C are co-infected with HIV. The report also shows that nearly 40 percent of the city's infections are among baby boomers (those born between 1945 and 1965). Almost 72 percent of active HCV infections in San Francisco are among men.

Hepatitis C advocates noted in the report that improving research about HCV in San Francisco (especially about the most-at risk groups of individuals) is an essential step in the city's goal to one day eliminate HCV as a public health threat. Other important steps toward elimination noted in the report included increased access to syringe access and disposal programs, access to methadone and buprenorphine treatment, widespread hepatitis education and testing, as well as a citywide policy of harm reduction.

For more information and a summary of the findings and analysis, click here.

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