Serious Heart Infection Is Rising in People With Hepatitis C

Infective endocarditis is a life-threatening bacterial infection of the heart valves that is associated with injection drug use.

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Diagnoses of the life-threatening bacterial infection of the heart valves known as infective endocarditis have increased over the past decade among people with hepatitis C virus (HCV), especially among young adults with the virus and those with opioid use disorder.

As described in Clinical Infectious Diseases, investigators analyzed data from commercial and Medicaid health insurance databases to estimate national endocarditis trends between 2007 and 2017.

They found that the weighted annual diagnosis rate of endocarditis per 100,000 people was 14 cases among those with commercial insurance and 79 cases among people with Medicaid.

On average, the diagnosis rate among those with commercial insurance declined by 1.0% each year. Among commercially insured people with HIV, the annual endocarditis diagnosis rate declined by an average of 4.3% annually, falling from 148 cases per 100,000 people in 2007 to 112 cases in 2017.

As for people with hep C, their annual diagnosis rate per 100,000 people increased from 172 cases in 2007 to 239 cases a decade later, for an average annual increase of 3.2%. During this period, the rate increased from 322 cases to 1,007 cases among people with hep C who were between 18 and 29 years old, for a 16.3% average annual increase. Further, the rate increased among those with opioid use disorder, from 156 cases to 643 cases, for an average annual increase of 14.8%

“This increase appears to parallel the ongoing national opioid crisis,” the study authors wrote. “Harm reduction with syringe services programs, medications for opioid use disorder and safe injection practices can prevent the spread of HIV, HCV and infectious endocarditis.”

To read the study, click here.

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