



Why the U.S. Is Falling Behind Other Countries in Hepatitis C Treatment

Since 2013, just 34% of people with hepatitis C have been cured in the United States.

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The United States currently trails several countries that are on track to eliminate [hepatitis C virus](#) (HCV) within the next decade, according to [The New York Times](#).

Fifteen countries including Egypt, Canada and Australia expect to eliminate HCV during this decade thanks to advances in HCV screening and treatment. Despite similar advancements in the United States, HCV cases remain high.

It's estimated that 2.4 million Americans are living with chronic HCV (about 1% of the adult population), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What's more, nearly 15,000 people died of HCV in 2020, and acute HCV cases quadrupled from 2009 to 2019.

HCV is a contagious but curable blood-borne disease that infects the liver. It can cause lifelong infection, liver fibrosis, cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure and death. Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine for HCV, so the best ways to prevent infection and its complications are by avoiding exposure and getting tested and treated in a timely manner.

[Treatment options](#) are available for those with HCV. Most treatments involve eight to 12 weeks of oral therapy. More than 95% of people with HCV can be cured with treatment, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC).

While most people with HCV can be cured through treatment, the most at-risk individuals include people who are incarcerated, uninsured or homeless.

A [recent study estimates](#) that over 90,000 people in U.S. state prisons have HCV, nearly nine times the prevalence of people outside the correctional system.

According to a [recent CDC analysis](#), just 34% of people with HCV have been cured in the United States since 2013.

To improve elimination rates, a recent initiative included in [President Joe Biden's latest budget proposal](#) asks for about \$5 billion to establish a five-year "subscription" contract via which the federal government would pay a flat fee to receive drugs for every patient enrolled for curative treatment, according to the NYT.

The initiative would also expand implementation of HCV screening and testing. According to the budget proposal, this program will result in net federal savings of \$4 billion over the next 10 years.

While several states have already implemented similar subscription contracts, they have seen limited success, according to the New York Times. Louisiana was the first state to test the idea in 2019. Although there was a significant increase in people treated through Medicaid and in correctional facilities, treatment rates decreased during the pandemic and have not rebounded.

Experts emphasize the need for additional funding to increase outreach, testing and specialists who are qualified to treat HCV. President Biden's initiative was included in last year's budget, but lawmakers have not introduced legislation to fund it yet.

If implemented throughout the country, a [group of scientists estimated that the initiative would prevent 24,000 deaths](#) within the next decade and save \$18.1 billion in medical costs for people with untreated HCV.

To read more, click [#Hepatitis C Treatment](#). There, you'll find headlines such as "[Free Hepatitis C Treatment Program Reduces Community Viral Load](#)," "[WHO Sounds Alarm on Viral Hepatitis Infections Claiming 3,500 Lives Each Day](#)" and "[Universal Hepatitis C Screening Benefits Cancer Patients](#)."