



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Alabamians, especially baby boomers, urged to 'Be #HepAware'

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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More Americans die from hepatitis C (HCV) than any other infectious disease, including HIV, pneumococcal disease and tuberculosis, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study found. Deaths in 2013 surpassed the total combined number of deaths from 60 other infectious diseases reported to the CDC.

About 3.5 million Americans, mostly baby boomers, are currently living with HCV disease and about half are unaware of their infection. The Alabama Department of Public Health urges the public to learn the risk factors of viral hepatitis during May, Hepatitis Awareness Month. People at risk, especially those born between 1945 and 1965, need to become more aware of viral hepatitis. CDC and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommend one-time HCV testing for everyone born during these years and regular testing for others at high risk.

The hashtag "Be #HepAware" aims to bring awareness to the impact of viral hepatitis and promote an online risk assessment tool that will help guide a person's decision to be tested for hepatitis C or vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.

Hepatitis means "inflammation of the liver" and is often caused by a virus. The three common viruses seen in the U.S. are hepatitis A, B and C. Viral hepatitis symptoms may include but are not limited to flu-like symptoms such as fever, vomiting and nausea. A person may experience other symptoms or no symptoms at all. Routine medical checkups do not include testing for viral hepatitis, so persons at risk are urged to talk with their medical provider about getting tested.

Hepatitis A (HAV) is usually transmitted via fecal-oral route from person to person or consumption of contaminated food or water. HAV is an acute infection and is highly contagious. The best way to prevent transmission is by getting vaccinated.

Some common ways hepatitis B (HBV) is transmitted include sexual contact with a person who is infected; sharing needles, syringes or other drug preparation equipment; or from mother to infant at birth. For some, HBV is a short-term illness. However, it can become a long-term, chronic infection that can lead to serious health problems. Children and unvaccinated at-risk adults should get vaccinated. Treatments are available for chronically ill persons.

HCV is perhaps the most notable because the vast majority of people with the virus are unaware they have it and are undiagnosed. While anyone can get HCV, more than 75 percent

of adults infected are people in the baby boom generation (born between 1945 and 1965). Baby boomers are five times more likely to have HCV than others are. The reason for their high rates of HCV is not completely understood. Most boomers are believed to have become infected in the 1970s and 1980s when rates of HCV were the highest.

HCV is spread primarily through contact with blood from an infected person. Getting tested can help everyone learn if they are infected. For many people, treatments are available that can cure HCV and prevent liver damage, cirrhosis and even liver cancer. Breakthroughs of new curative treatments have helped to make some progress towards elimination of the virus, but HCV remains a serious health problem.

Today, people sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs get most new HCV infections. For some, it is a short-term illness, but for 70 to 85 percent of people who become infected with HCV, it becomes a long-term, chronic infection which can result in death. Most people might not be aware of their infection because they are not experiencing symptoms. The best way to prevent HCV is by avoiding behaviors that can spread the disease, especially injecting drugs.

For information on testing and treatment locations, visit <http://www.uab.edu/medicine/activec/active-c-testing-and-treatment-locations>, the Alabama Coalition for Testing, Interventions, and Engagement in HCV Care (ACTIVE- C).

To assess risk, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/riskassessment/> or [adph.org/hepatitis](http://adph.org/hepatitis) and take the online risk assessment to get a personalized report. For more information, contact Adult Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinator Ronada Anderson at (334) 206-5364.