

HEPATITIS C:

A GROWING THREAT TO THE LATINO COMMUNITY

The hepatitis C virus is a public health crisis for all Americans, yet it is particularly harmful to Latinos, which are the fastest growing minority group in the United States. Within the Latino community, prevalence of hepatitis C is 2.6 percent – much higher than the national average of 1.5 percent. Even more concerning, studies indicate that hepatitis C infections are on the rise among Latinos. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), prevalence of the virus rose 23.5 percent for Latinos from 2010-2011, compared to 21.4 percent during 2000-2010.

KNOWN AS THE SILENT KILLER, HEPATITIS C IS INCREASINGLY COMMON AMONG LATINO AMERICANS, YET OFTEN STAYS UNDIAGNOSED UNTIL THE VIRUS HAS ALREADY TAKEN ITS TOLL.

HEPATITIS C: BOTH RAMPANT & POTENTIALLY DEADLY WITHIN THE LATINO COMMUNITY

In addition to a higher rate of hepatitis C infection, Latinos have a higher hepatitis C mortality rate. CDC data for the year 2011 shows the hepatitis C mortality rate per 100,000 people was 4 for Caucasians and 7.15 – nearly two times higher – for Latinos. A National Institute of Health (NIH) study determined Latinos with viral hepatitis have faster liver fibrosis progression rates, are infected at an earlier age, and are more likely to be HIV co-infected – all aspects which make this community especially vulnerable to the liver disease, cancer and other deadly conditions resulting from hepatitis C.

LATINOS ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE SCREENED FOR HEPATITIS C – ALLOWING FOR INCREASING RATES OF INFECTION

Testing is critical to treating hepatitis C, but because the virus is often asymptomatic for years or even decades, many at-risk individuals, including Latino Americans, are not screened. Research from the CDC and medical journals suggest that Latinos are less likely to get screened than the general population – even in the presence of other known risk factors.

All Americans need to hear the message that hepatitis C, while rampant, is preventable, often treatable, and detected through a simple diagnostic test. Screening for hepatitis C is the first step to connect infected individuals with treatment and to prevent the disease from spreading. Empowering Latinos and other at-risk individuals to know their hepatitis C status is the first step in the fight against this silent killer.

HEPATITIS C FACTS

- 3.2 million Americans are estimated to be living with hepatitis C – the leading cause of catastrophic liver damage (cirrhosis), liver cancer and the most common reason for liver transplants.
- Up to 75 percent of individuals living with hepatitis C do not realize they are infected because the disease often takes years, or even decades, to cause symptoms.
- While the virus remains undetected, causing potentially life-threatening liver damage, individuals can unknowingly transmit the disease to others.
- Hepatitis C is most prevalent among baby boomers, who are five times more likely to be infected. In fact, 75 percent of Americans living with hepatitis C were born between 1945 and 1965.
- Hepatitis C disproportionately affects minority Americans. Prevalence of the virus is 3 percent among African Americans and 2.6 percent among Latinos, compared to 1.5 percent of the general population. Prevalence is highest among American Indians.
- Unless current trends are reversed, the CDC predicts that deaths due to the virus will double or even triple in the next 20 years.

Source: The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention



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