

Hepatitis Awareness Month and Testing Day — May 2016

This month marks the 21st Hepatitis Awareness Month and the 5th observance of May 19 as National Hepatitis Testing Day in the United States. Approximately 90% of U.S. deaths from viral hepatitis are caused by infection with hepatitis C virus (HCV). In 2013, for the first time, deaths associated with HCV infection surpassed the total number of deaths from 60 other nationally notifiable infectious diseases (1). In 2014, the HCV-related incidence rate and mortality rate among American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations were approximately twofold greater than the comparable rates for the general population (2).

This issue of *MMWR* includes two reports describing actions in AI communities to improve access to HCV testing, care, and curative treatment. The first report evaluates a tribal HCV testing policy established by the Cherokee Nation (CN). Findings indicated that, during 2012–2015, first-time testing for HCV increased fivefold, and HCV treatment more than doubled among CN members. The second report examines the impact of an Indian Health Service (IHS) program to promote implementation of the CDC recommendation for one-time HCV testing for persons in the 1945–1965 birth cohort. As a result, during 2012–2015, HCV testing increased fourfold among those in the birth cohort across IHS clinics in 34 states. Data from both reports reveal that strategies such as provider education, clinical decision tools, and telehealth models of care can expand access to HCV testing and treatment, helping to eliminate hepatitis C as a health disparity for AI/AN populations.

References

1. Ly KN, Hughes EM, Jiles RB, Holmberg SD. Rising mortality associated with hepatitis C virus in the United States, 2003–2013. *Clin Infect Dis* 2016;62:1287–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciw111>
2. CDC. Viral hepatitis-hepatitis C information. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2016. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>

Identification and Clinical Management of Persons with Chronic Hepatitis C Virus Infection — Cherokee Nation, 2012–2015

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An estimated 3.5 million persons in the United States are living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection, resulting in approximately 20,000 deaths each year, primarily from cirrhosis or hepatocellular carcinoma (1,2). American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations have the highest incidence of acute

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Continuing Education examination available at http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/cme/conted_info.html#weekly.

