

# Understanding Viral Hepatitis in African Americans Health Note

## Viral Hepatitis



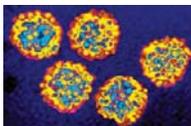
**"Hepatitis" means inflammation of the liver and also refers to a group of viral infections that affect the liver . The most common types are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.**

**Viral hepatitis is the leading cause of liver cancer and the most common reason for liver transplantation. An estimated 4.4 million Americans are living with chronic hepatitis; most do not know they are infected.**

## Hepatitis Overview

Viral hepatitis, including hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, are distinct diseases that affect the liver and have different hepatitis symptoms and treatments. Other causes of hepatitis include recreational drugs and prescription medications. Hepatitis type is determined by laboratory tests.

### Digestive Diseases and Hepatitis A



#### What Are the Symptoms of Hepatitis A?

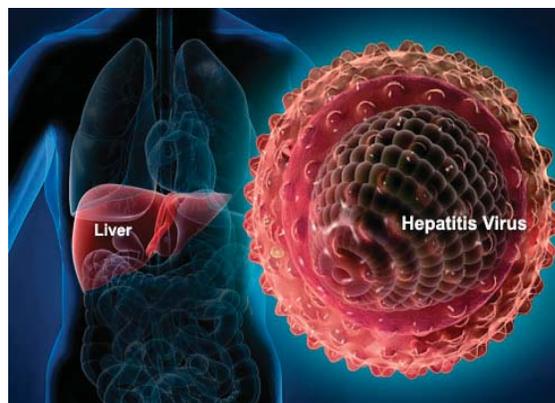
**Hepatitis A** is inflammation of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.

When symptoms occur, they may include:

- **Jaundice** (condition causing yellow eyes and skin, dark urine)
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Fever
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue

Children often have hepatitis A with few symptoms.

A person can spread the hepatitis A virus about 2 weeks before his or her symptoms appear and during the first week of having symptoms. People with no symptoms can also spread the virus.



# How Is Hepatitis A Transmitted?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of people with hepatitis A. It is spread from person to person by putting something in your mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person.

Therefore, hepatitis A is most commonly transmitted in drinking water or food contaminated with the stool containing the virus.

It is spread easily where there is poor sanitation or poor personal hygiene.

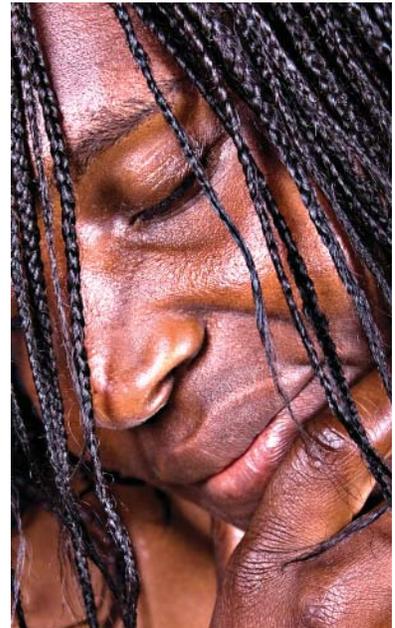
Other ways to get hepatitis A include:

- Eating fruits, vegetables, or other foods that were contaminated during handling
- Eating raw shellfish harvested from water contaminated with the virus
- Swallowing contaminated water or ice

## Who Is at Highest Risk of Hepatitis A?

Those who are the highest risk of hepatitis A infection include:

- People living with or having sex with an infected person
- People traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common
- Men who have sex with men
- Injecting and noninjecting drug users
- Children and employees in child care settings



## How Is Hepatitis A Diagnosed?

Blood tests can diagnose hepatitis A.

### Are There Any Long-Term Effects of Hepatitis A?

[Hepatitis A causes](#) acute (short-lived) infection. The liver heals itself over a few weeks to months. Usually the virus doesn't cause any long-term problems or complications. However, according to the CDC, 10% to 15% of people with hepatitis A will have prolonged or relapsing symptoms over a six- to nine-month period. Rarely, patients will develop acute [liver failure](#), which can be fatal, or require a liver transplant.

## What's the Treatment for Hepatitis A?

There are no treatments that will cure hepatitis A. Your health care provider may monitor your liver function tests to be sure your body is healing appropriately.

## Is There a Hepatitis A Vaccine?

Yes. Vaccination against hepatitis A is recommended for people older than 1 year old who:

- Are traveling to areas of the world with increased hepatitis A infection
- Are men who have sex with other men
- Have a blood clotting problem
- Are injecting and noninjecting drug users
- Have chronic liver disease

The vaccine is given in two divided doses.

# Can Hepatitis A Be Prevented?

Vaccination is your best defense against hepatitis A. In addition, if you come in contact with someone with hepatitis A you can receive a specific medication called immune globulin within two weeks of contact.

Good hygiene is also important. Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, before and after handling food, and after changing a diaper.

## Hepatitis B

**Hepatitis B** is a virus that infects the liver. Most adults who get it have it for a short time and then get better. This is called acute hepatitis B.

Sometimes the virus causes a long-term infection, called chronic hepatitis B. Over time, it can damage your **liver**. Babies and young children infected with the virus are more likely to get chronic hepatitis B.

You can have hepatitis B and not know it. You may not have symptoms. If you do, they can make you feel like you have the **flu**. But as long as you have the virus, you can spread it to others.

It's caused by the hepatitis B virus. It is spread through contact with the **blood** and body fluids of an infected person.

You may get hepatitis B if you:

- Have sex with an infected person without using a **condom**.
- Share needles (used for injecting **drugs**) with an infected person.
- Get a tattoo or piercing with tools that weren't sterilized.
- Share personal items like razors or **toothbrushes** with an infected person.

A mother who has the virus can pass it to her baby during delivery. Medical experts recommend that all **pregnant** women get tested for hepatitis B. If you have the virus, your baby can get shots to help prevent infection with the virus.

You **cannot** get hepatitis B from casual contact such as hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, or sharing food or drinks.

Many people with hepatitis B don't know they have it, because they don't have symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you may just feel like you have the flu. Symptoms include:

- Feeling very tired.
- Mild fever.
- **Headache**.
- Not wanting to eat.
- Feeling sick to your **stomach** or **vomiting**.
- Belly pain.
- **Diarrhea** or **constipation**.
- Muscle aches and joint pain.
- **Skin rash**.
- Yellowish **eyes** and **skin** (jaundice). Jaundice usually appears only after other symptoms have started to go away.



Most people with chronic hepatitis B have no symptoms.

A simple blood test can tell your doctor if you have the hepatitis B virus now or if you had it in the past. Your doctor also may be able to tell if you have had the **vaccine** to prevent the virus.

# Hepatitis C

If your doctor thinks you may have liver damage from hepatitis B, he or she may use a needle to take a tiny sample of your liver for testing. This is called a [liver biopsy](#).

[Hepatitis C](#) is a disease caused by a virus that infects the [liver](#). In time, it can lead to permanent [liver](#) damage as well as [cirrhosis](#), [liver cancer](#), and [liver failure](#).

Many people don't know that they have hepatitis C until they already have some liver damage. This can take many years. Some people who get hepatitis C have it for a short time and then get better. This is called acute hepatitis C. But most people who are infected with the virus go on to develop long-term, or chronic, hepatitis C.

Although hepatitis C can be very serious, most people can manage the disease and lead active, full lives.

Hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus. It is spread by contact with an infected person's [blood](#). You can get hepatitis C if:

You share needles and other equipment used to inject illegal [drugs](#). This is the most common way to get hepatitis C in the United States.

You had a blood transfusion or [organ transplant](#) before 1992. As of 1992 in the United States, all donated blood and organs are screened for hepatitis C.

You get a shot with a needle that has infected blood on it. This happens in some developing countries where they use needles more than once when giving shots.

You get a tattoo or a piercing with a needle that has infected blood on it. This can happen if equipment isn't cleaned properly after it is used.

In rare cases, a mother with hepatitis C spreads the virus to her baby at birth, or a [health care](#) worker is accidentally exposed to blood that is infected with hepatitis C.

Experts aren't sure if you can get hepatitis C through sexual contact. If there is a risk of getting the virus through sexual contact, it is very small. The risk is higher if you have many sex partners.

You **cannot** get hepatitis C from casual contact such as hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, or sharing food or drink.

Most people have no symptoms when they are first infected with the hepatitis C virus. If you do develop symptoms, they may include:

- Feeling very tired.
- Joint pain.
- Belly pain.
- [Itchy skin](#).
- Sore muscles.
- Dark urine.
- Yellowish [eyes](#) and [skin](#) ([jaundice](#)). Jaundice usually appears only after other symptoms have started to go away.



Most people go on to develop [chronic hepatitis C](#) but still don't have symptoms. This makes it common for people to have hepatitis C for 15 years or longer before it is diagnosed.

Many people find out by accident that they have the virus. They find out when their blood is tested before a [blood donation](#) or as part of a routine checkup. Often people with hepatitis C have high levels of liver enzymes in their blood.

# Surveillance for Viral Hepatitis - United States, 2011 SUMMARY

As part of CDC's National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System (NNDSS), viral hepatitis case-reports are received electronically from state health departments via CDC's National Electronic Telecommunications System for Surveillance (NETSS), a computerized public health surveillance system that provides CDC with data regarding cases of nationally notifiable diseases on a weekly basis. Although surveillance infrastructure is in place for reporting of acute infection, reports of chronic hepatitis B and C, which account for the greatest burden of disease, are not submitted by all states. As noted in a recent report from the Institute of Medicine ([1](#)), surveillance capacity to monitor both acute and chronic viral hepatitis is limited at the state and local levels, resulting in underreporting and incomplete variable quality data that is insufficient for understanding the magnitude of viral hepatitis.

Data in this report should be interpreted with the consideration that reported cases of acute or chronic viral hepatitis represent only those relatively few infected persons who were detected, diagnosed, met a stringent case definition, and eventually reported to CDC in 2011.

Because most acute and chronic infections are not reported, this Summary is mainly useful in detecting major trends in viral hepatitis A (HAV), B (HBV) and C (HCV). In 2011 and 2012 a major effort was undertaken to improve methodologies for estimating total number of new cases of hepatitis A, B and C from the number of cases reported for each disease ([2](#)). Estimates in this report of incidence of new infections were obtained using the newly improved methodology ([2](#)). These estimates cannot be compared to previous years' estimates that were obtained using different (unpublished) procedures; however, trends seen in reported data still pertain, such as the increase in acute HCV in young persons evident in 2011.

Because chronic HBV and HCV infection are largely hidden and part of what the current US Assistant Secretary for Health, Dr. Howard Koh has dubbed the "Secret Epidemic" ([3](#)), this report also provides data to inform our understanding of the current epidemic of chronic hepatitis B and C.

With progressive infant vaccination recommendations since 1996—with universal infant vaccination since 2006—vaccination rates and evidence of vaccine-induced immunity in young patients have been increasing continuously in the past decade ([4](#), [5](#)). Half of all hepatitis A infections now apparently are acquired overseas by adult travelers ([6](#)). The major public health demands regarding hepatitis A relate to newly discovered HAV-infected foodhandlers, as these place a large burden on local public health departments to notify, test, and vaccinate potentially infected restaurant patrons ([7](#)). There were 1,398 reported cases of acute HAV in 2011. After asymptomatic infections and under-reporting were taken into account, it was estimated that approximately 2,700 (1,650-4,370) new infections occurred in 2011.

Acute hepatitis B has been declining in incidence since 1990 mainly due to effective vaccination strategies, but chronic HBV, estimated at 700,000-1.4 million of the US population ([8](#), [9](#)), remains a major public health challenge. As the surveillance data in this report and other data indicate, about half of all chronic HBV infections are among persons born in Asia and Asian-Americans who were born to HBV-infected mothers in the United States. Identifying these chronically infected persons and linking them to care remains a challenge ([10](#), [11](#)). There were 2,890 cases of acute HBV reported in 2011. After adjusting for asymptomatic infections and under-reporting, the estimated number of new HBV infections was approximately 18,800 (7,400- 86,200), and treatment ([10](#), [11](#)).

# Hepatitis and African Americans



**Hepatitis B infection has dropped significantly since 1991, but remains an area of concern for the African American population.**

**In 2010, non-Hispanic Blacks were 1.5 times as likely to die from viral hepatitis, as compared to non-Hispanic Whites.**

**Among all ethnic groups in 2011, African Americans had the highest rate of Hepatitis B.**

**African Americans were twice as likely to develop Hepatitis B, in 2011, than the White population.**

**African Americans between the ages of 19-24 were three times more likely to have Hepatitis B, in 2008.**

## ***Background***

### **Health Emergency Declaration**

The National Black Church Initiative's Health Emergency Declaration (HED) is a comprehensive approach to tackling the tragic state of health in the Black community. For decades the African American community has seen no decrease in the health disparities gap in America despite the many attempts to fix the issue by the government and private organizations. The reason that these plans did not work are many, but the underlying cause of all of them is that they did not have an already established grounding in the Black community. Through the establishment of 35 innovative health prevention communities HED plans to create actual change using proven, scientific methods that will educate these communities across the country and promote preventive healthcare among them. Because of the Black Church's leading role in the Black community HED will have a greater and lasting impact on the African American community and seriously help to decrease the health disparities that are so prevalent within it.

#### ***Reasons for Declaring a Health Emergency***

The National Black Church Initiative believes that there are ten reasons that a national health emergency must be declared in the Black community.

- Lack of proper programming
- Denial of the latest clinical treatment to African Americans AIDS
- Lack of funding from specialized groups
- African Americans suffer disproportionately in most disease states
- Government spending has not been sufficient
- Obesity is running rampant
- African Americans are lacking in health coverage
- Racism within the medical profession
- Lack of Black doctors in medical schools

#### ***HED Functionality***

HED will be comprised of proven scientific methods that will bring health education and preventive healthcare to the Black community.

- \* 35 Health Communities
- \* Clinical Trials
- \* Chronic Health Initiatives 35 Health Panels in each community
- \* Master of Public Health
- \* Congregational-Based Health Personnel Volunteer Corps
- \* HED AIDS Initiative
- \* COPD Initiative
- \* Faith Based Marketing Health Strategy
- \* Church's as Preventive Health Centers
- \* Scientific Health Prevention Modeling
- \* Web-based Health Television
- \* Web-based Faith Health Radio
- \* Social Health Networks
- \* NBCI Health Note
- \* NBCI
- \* Communication and Distribution Network