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## Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

### PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

**To:** Medical Providers, Clinicians, Hospitals, Healthcare Facilities, Physician Practices, Corrections and Veteran Agencies, School Health Care, Emergency Services

**From:** Dr. Siiri Bennett, State Epidemiologist

**Subject:** **Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month: Information for Clinicians**

**Date / Time:** Tuesday, May 07, 2019 at 8:45am

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**Abstract:** May is Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month. Maine CDC urges clinicians to understand the burden of hepatitis B and C in Maine and to follow key recommendations for testing and prevention. All persons at risk for hepatitis B and C should be tested and those who are susceptible should be vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

Maine has seen a sharp increase in the rates of acute hepatitis B and C. From 2013 to 2018, acute hepatitis B rates increased 388% and acute hepatitis C rates increased 314%. Viral hepatitis is a leading cause of liver cancer and the most common reason for liver transplantation among adults in the U.S. More people die from hepatitis C than all other 60 reported infectious diseases combined. Hepatitis C is 10 times more infectious than HIV and hepatitis B is 100 times more infectious than HIV.

Medical providers should assess their patients for risk factors and test those at risk for hepatitis B and C. Medical providers are urged to recommend vaccination for hepatitis B in persons who have not already been vaccinated and to vaccinate any patient diagnosed with hepatitis C for hepatitis A and B.

All cases of hepatitis are reportable in Maine. Providers with suspected cases should report them to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

## **Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month: Information for Clinicians**

May is Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month. Maine CDC urges clinicians to understand the burden of hepatitis B and C in Maine and to follow key recommendations for testing and prevention. All persons at risk for hepatitis B and C should be tested and those who are susceptible should be vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.

**Background:** Maine has seen a sharp increase in the rates of acute hepatitis B and C. From 2013 to 2018, acute hepatitis B rates increased 388% and acute hepatitis C rates increased 314%. Viral hepatitis is a leading cause of liver cancer and the most common reason for liver transplantation among adults in the U.S. More people die from hepatitis C than all other 60 reported infectious diseases combined. Hepatitis C is 10 times more infectious than HIV and hepatitis B is 100 times more infectious than HIV.

### **Persons at highest risk in Maine include:**

- People who inject drugs (even once, even if a long time ago)
- Persons who have been incarcerated
- Persons with multiple sex partners
- Individuals born between 1945-1965 (Baby Boomers)
- Persons who received unlicensed tattoos

### **Other people at risk include:**

- Recipients of clotting factor concentrates before 1987
- Recipients of blood transfusions or donated organs before July 1992
- Long-term hemodialysis patients
- Persons with known exposures to hepatitis C virus or HCV (e.g., healthcare workers after needlesticks, recipients of blood or organs from a donor who later tested positive for HCV)
- HIV-infected persons
- Infants born to infected mothers

### **Symptoms:**

- Do not rely on the presence of symptoms before testing.
- Less than 50% of people with hepatitis B have symptoms.
- Less than 30% of people with hepatitis C have symptoms.
- When present, signs and symptoms of hepatitis B and C infections can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, and jaundice.

**Testing and Treatment:**

- **Testing is the only way to know if you have hepatitis B or hepatitis C.**
- Less than 50% of people infected with hepatitis C know they are infected.
- Getting tested can help people learn if they are infected, get them into lifesaving care and treatment, and help them not to spread the infection to others.

**Consequences of Not Treating Hepatitis Early:**

- 75%-85% of people who get infected with hepatitis C will become chronically infected if not treated.
- 60%–70% of people with chronic hepatitis C will go on to develop liver disease.
- The longer people live with undiagnosed and untreated hepatitis B and C, the more likely they are to develop serious, life-threatening liver disease.
- There is treatment to control hepatitis B and C infections. However, preventing life threatening liver disease depends on early detection and treatment.

**Recommendations for Clinicians:**

- Assess patients for risk factors.
- Test patients at risk for hepatitis B and hepatitis C.
- Recommend vaccination for hepatitis B in persons who have not already been vaccinated.
- Any patient diagnosed with hepatitis C should be vaccinated for hepatitis A and B. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

**Reporting:** Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E are reportable conditions in the State of Maine. Health care providers should report all cases of acute hepatitis to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821 immediately on recognition or strong suspicion of disease. Cases of chronic hepatitis B, C and D (conventional and rapid tests) should be reported within 48 hours of recognition or strong suspicion of disease.

**For More Information:** Please visit the following websites and documents or call the 24/7 disease reporting and consultation line at 1-800-821-5821.

- Maine CDC Hepatitis website:  
<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/hepatitis/index.shtml>
- U.S. CDC viral hepatitis website: [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)
- US CDC Hepatitis C & Injection Drug Use Fact Sheet:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HCV/PDFs/FactSheet-PWID.pdf>
- Recommendations for Prevention and Control of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) Infection and HCV-Related Chronic Disease. MMWR 1998; 47 (No. RR-19).