

# The power of **universal screening** for hepatitis C

As a healthcare provider, you have a **unique opportunity** to turn the tide on hepatitis C infection and improve your patients' HCV outcomes

**Hepatitis C remains a silent epidemic** in the United States, where an estimated **2.4 million people are living with chronic hepatitis C**.<sup>1</sup> Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is associated with more deaths than the top 60 other reportable infectious diseases combined, including HIV.<sup>2</sup> With the latest data showing dramatic increases in HCV infection, particularly among younger people, healthcare professionals are being challenged to identify new cases, not only to successfully treat patients and prevent poor outcomes, but also to prevent further disease transmission.

Fortunately, new guidelines recommending universal screening in all adults can empower care providers to screen more patients and detect more infections. Utilizing simplified HCV therapies to treat sooner and clear more patients of the virus can **improve outcomes while preventing the spread of infection**.

## The severity of the HCV epidemic

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>3,4</sup>:

- New hepatitis C cases are 4 times as frequent as they were 10 years ago.
- In 2018, the percentage of newly reported chronic infections was equal among Baby Boomers (born 1945-1965) and Millennials (born 1981-1996), both around 36%, while Generation X (born 1966-1980) made up 23%
- Younger adults 20 to 39 years old have the highest rates of new hepatitis C cases
- The annual rate of reported acute hepatitis C in the US tripled from 0.3 cases/100,000 people in 2009 to 1.2 cases/100,000 people in 2018
- Rates of acute hepatitis C among people of reproductive age are increasing
- Most new HCV infections are occurring in persons who inject drugs (PWID)

# 20-39


**YEARS OLD**

Age range with the **highest rates of new HCV cases**<sup>3</sup>



### Increasing rates of acute hepatitis C

among young adults, including reproductive-aged persons, have put multiple generations at risk for chronic hepatitis C.<sup>4</sup>



Today most people become infected with HCV by **sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs**.<sup>5</sup>

As HCV infection continues to emerge as a serious public health concern concurrent with the nation's opioid crisis, healthcare providers have the opportunity to decrease its impact with **universal rapid screening, linkage to care, and treatment**.

Until recently, **HCV screening guidelines have not included universal screening**, instead focusing testing on at-risk groups such as Baby Boomers and PWID. (Historically, the highest prevalence of chronic hepatitis C in the United States has been among Baby Boomers.<sup>6</sup>) This focused approach risked missing infections in patients whose risk profiles were incomplete—for example, in younger patients who had not disclosed use of illicit injectable drugs. In response to higher rates of HCV infection among younger people, leading medical authorities are now unanimous in recommending universal screening for all adults. A summary of their recommendations appears below.

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>7</sup>

- Hepatitis C screening at least once in a lifetime for all adults aged 18 years and older, except in settings where the prevalence of HCV infection (HCV RNA positivity) is less than 0.1%
- Hepatitis C screening for all pregnant women during each pregnancy, except in settings where the prevalence of HCV infection (HCV RNA positivity) is less than 0.1%
- One-time hepatitis C testing regardless of age or setting prevalence among people with recognized conditions or exposures
- Routine periodic testing for people with ongoing risk factors:
  - People who currently inject drugs and share needles, syringes, or other drug preparation equipment
  - People who have received maintenance hemodialysis
- Testing for any person who requests hepatitis C testing

### US Preventive Services Task Force<sup>8</sup>

- Screening for HCV infection in adults aged 18 to 79 years

### American College of Obstetricians (ACOG)<sup>9</sup>

- Screening for all pregnant individuals during each pregnancy

### HCVGuidelines.org<sup>10</sup>

#### American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases | Infectious Diseases Society of America

- One-time, routine, opt-out HCV testing for all individuals aged 18 years and older
- One-time HCV testing for all persons less than 18 years old with behaviors, exposures, or conditions or circumstances associated with an increased risk of HCV infection
- Periodic repeat HCV testing offered to all persons with behaviors, exposures, or conditions or circumstances associated with an increased risk of HCV exposure
- Annual HCV testing for all persons who inject drugs and for HIV-infected men who have unprotected sex with men

### References

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