

Alaska Hepatitis Activities

The Alaska Hepatitis Prevention Program coordinates the state's public health activities related to viral hepatitis. The Section of Epidemiology (SOE) is responsible for hepatitis surveillance, vaccination programs, infectious disease outbreak response, prevention, and integration activities. In addition, local public health centers throughout the state have responsibilities for assessment, vaccination, education and response in their communities. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) serves the Alaska Native population in their communities with interaction at the state and local public health. Public and private primary care providers and specialists provide screening, testing, vaccination, care and treatment for all types of hepatitis.

To date, resources devoted to hepatitis in Alaska have been limited. Viral hepatitis funding represents far less than what is dedicated to the prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS, despite higher incidence and prevalence in the state and the fact that certain types of hepatitis are more infectious than HIV.

Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinator (VHPC)

The Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinator for the State of Alaska is housed in the Section of Epidemiology. The role of the VHPC is to foster interaction across SOE programs. The VHPC is charged with the management and coordination of activities directed toward prevention of viral hepatitis infections including integration of prevention services and messages into clinical services and prevention programs serving adults at risk for viral hepatitis.

The VHPC:

- Networks across SOE by building on the relationships between the Infectious Disease, HIV / STD, and Immunization Programs to ensure that materials and information about viral hepatitis are included as appropriate in program activities and to increase opportunities for collaboration on trainings, immunization and testing initiatives.
- Communicates with external agencies in Alaska to promote collaboration with partners in the Alaska Department of Corrections, CDC-Arctic Investigations Program, ANTHC, and the Veterans Health Administration.
- Works collaboratively with other governmental, non-profit and private programs that provide services for adults at risk, including STD/HIV prevention and treatment, drug addiction treatment and outreach, and correctional health.
- Serves as a resource for Alaska health care providers for obtaining information related to viral hepatitis prevention.

- Acts as the Alaska state representative at national meetings and as the point of contact for CDC and other national agencies.

Hepatitis Advisory Working Group

In 2014 the Alaska Section of Epidemiology along with State, Tribal, and private practice partners organized the Hepatitis Advisory Working Group. This group came together to address the high prevalence rate of viral hepatitis in Alaska and develop a strategic plan for the prevention, care, and treatment of Alaskans with chronic hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C (HCV) and associated morbidities. Also of concern are co-infected individuals. In 2012, 202 Alaskans were co-infected with HIV/HCV, 23 with HCV/Tuberculosis (TB) and 12 were coinfecting with both HCV and HBV. In coinfecting HIV/HCV persons HCV infection progresses faster, leading to serious liver disease. HCV is also exacerbated by the continued use of alcohol or drugs (including injection drugs and medications used in retro-viral therapy for HIV positive persons), which causes further toxicity and damage to the liver. In addition, persons with previous diagnosis and history of sexually transmitted infections (STI) are also at higher risk for infection with viral hepatitis. Thus, raising awareness and priority of hepatitis and coordination between HIV, STI, and all forms of viral hepatitis is essential in any infectious disease work.

Detection

Viral hepatitis is reportable to the SOE. SOE conducts passive surveillance for hepatitis through laboratories and health care providers. Like many states, hepatitis surveillance in Alaska has been underfunded and fragmented. SOE investigates all cases of acute hepatitis A and acute hepatitis B recommending immunization to close contacts of acute cases. Due to widespread vaccination efforts through ANTHC and the State of Alaska Immunization Program, Alaska has virtually eliminated hepatitis A from our population. Where once large outbreaks compromising thousands of cases regularly occurred up until the early 1990's, only a few cases are reported in Alaska each year, most often associated with international travel. Without resources for a comprehensive chronic HBV database, the burden of disease in Alaska remains unknown. A handful of acute HBV cases are reported each year often associated with injection drug use. The median number of annual reports of HCV in Alaska is 957, yielding an average annual rate of 133.8 cases per 100,000 population. Baby Boomers, those born from 1945-1965, represent 75% of new cases reported nationally prompting a national recommendation for all persons in this age cohort to be tested one time for HCV. A 45% increase of HCV in young adults since 2011 is associated with injection drug use, particularly heroin.

Most people with HCV do not have symptoms until they are further along in their disease.

Prevention through Vaccination

Immunization is the best way to prevent hepatitis A and B. There is no vaccine against hepatitis C. The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services recommends vaccination against hepatitis A and B for children and adults. Hepatitis immunization is available for children through age 18 at your local public health center. The immunization schedule and a list of the State of Alaska Public Health Centers are available on our webpage. The Perinatal Hepatitis B case management program is designed to identify, track, educate, and continue to further prevent HBV infection in newborns.

Education

The hepatitis program supports prevention through education. The VHPC has partnered with Hepatitis Education Project of Seattle to bring comprehensive education to hepatitis practitioners and their support staff statewide. As resources permit, these onsite presentations offer the most up-to-date information on viral hepatitis including the newest HCV treatment information. Fact sheets and other information on hepatitis A, B, and C can be found on this webpage. Links to reliable hepatitis information sources are found on the resource guide.

Testing

Hepatitis B and C screening and testing is recommended for adults at increased risk for hepatitis infection. Lab testing for hepatitis A, B, and C is available at the Alaska State Virology Laboratory through private providers, public health centers, and community health centers. A listing of these testing sites is available on our resource page.

The 20-minute OraQuick Rapid HCV antibody test is available at these locations:

Municipality of Anchorage Health Department

9th and L Streets

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Call 907-343-4799 for an appointment

Alaska AIDS Assistance Association (Four A's) and Anchorage Syringe Exchange

888 Fireweed Ave

Anchorage, Alaska 99503

907-263-2050 call for testing information

Interior AIDS Association (IAA) and Northern Exchange

710 3rd Avenue

Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

907-452-4222 call for more information

Treatment

Effective treatments are available for hepatitis B and C. Advances in hepatitis C treatment offer simpler dosing, shorter treatment durations, fewer side effects, and higher cure rates which eliminate the virus from the body and prevent liver damage, cirrhosis, and even liver cancer.

Viral Hepatitis Webpage and Resource Guide

Our webpage contains information from reliable hepatitis websites including Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD). Information on local and financial resources is included in the hepatitis resource guide.