

Health Awareness

Hepatitis C: What You Need To Know About This Silent Killer

(NAPSA)—Nearly 5 million Americans are infected with hepatitis C, but 75 percent of people with the disease don't even know they have it because it is often symptomless for decades.

Hepatitis C is a serious liver disease spread through infected blood. It is the leading cause of liver failure, liver cancer and liver transplants and contributes to up to 15,000 deaths a year in the U.S.

But—there is good news. For many people, hepatitis C can be cured.

Boomers Most at Risk

Eighty-two percent of people with hepatitis C are baby boomers (those born between 1945 and 1965) but, alarmingly, almost three-quarters (74 percent) of boomers have never been tested or are unsure if they've been tested for the disease, according to a new survey. Even more alarming, 80 percent do not consider themselves at any risk for the disease.

The findings of the survey, which was conducted by Harris Interactive as part of I.D. Hep C, a national American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) campaign intended to educate the public about hepatitis C, raise concern because they show a widespread lack of knowledge about the disease.

Those at risk for hepatitis C include:

- People who had blood transfusions or organ transplants before 1992;
- People with tattoos or body piercings;

Nearly 75% of baby boomers have never been tested for hepatitis C, despite being most at risk.



Nearly 75 percent of baby boomers born between 1945 and 1965 have never been tested for hepatitis C, even though this age group represents 82 percent of people with the disease.

- People who used intravenous drugs, even once;
- People who work in a health care setting;
- People with HIV.

African Americans and Hispanics are also affected at a significantly higher rate than the general population.

Screening Is Key

Hepatitis C is diagnosed with a simple blood test, but screening is not currently part of routine testing. This means you may think you have been tested, but chances are you haven't.

As part of the I.D. Hep C campaign, the AGA is urging baby boomers and others at risk to talk to their health care providers about being tested. By visiting www.IDHepC.org, people can learn more about hepatitis C and how to get tested. The AGA is also encouraging people to visit the website and take a virtual pledge to get tested and spread the word. I.D. Hep C is sponsored by Vertex.