



National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As New Hepatitis B and C Infections Increase, the Nation's Local Health Departments Are Working to Protect Americans

*Statement by Laura Hanen, MPP, Interim Executive Director and Chief of Government Affairs
of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)*

Washington, DC, May 15, 2017 — “New hepatitis C infections have nearly tripled over five years, according to [new preliminary surveillance data](#) recently released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 3.5 million Americans are living with hepatitis C virus, making it the most common chronic blood-borne infection in the United States. Baby boomers are six times more likely to be infected with hepatitis C than those in other age groups and are at much greater risk for death from the virus, but the greatest increases were among young people aged 20-29. This is primarily a result of increasing injection drug use associated with America’s growing opioid epidemic. Approximately half of people living with hepatitis C virus have no symptoms and don’t know they are infected, and the vast majority of new infections go undiagnosed. The surveillance report also shows a continued rise in new hepatitis B infections, which increased by 20.7 percent in 2015.

“Hepatitis B and C present significant challenges to public health and healthcare systems. NACCHO calls on the federal government to provide the funding and commitment necessary to address these challenges. As the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s new consensus report, [A National Strategy for the Elimination of Hepatitis B and C](#), states, we can eliminate hepatitis B and C as public health threats by 2030 if the appropriate leadership, investment, and strategies are fulfilled. Hepatitis B and C are

completely preventable, but only when we commit the resources necessary for testing, treatment, and in the case of hepatitis C, a cure.

“Resources must reach the local level, where local health departments are providing critical services and leadership to these efforts. The funding to address viral hepatitis is severely limited, and the failure to act on this data will have significant consequences for our communities. The lack of resources is particularly concerning, in the facing of a growing opioid epidemic that is fueling increases in injection drug use, a critical risk factor in the spread of hepatitis B and C, as well as HIV. Without appropriate federal and state funding and public policies, local health departments will struggle to implement effective public health interventions to prevent and treat viral hepatitis.

“In addition to the surveillance report, two MMWR articles were released: [*State HCV Incidence and Policies Related to HCV Preventive and Treatment Services for Persons Who Inject Drugs*](#), which demonstrate the need for comprehensive approaches to combat the dual epidemics of opioid addiction and injection-related infections diseases, including syringe services programs; and [*Hepatitis C Virus Infection Among Women Giving Birth*](#), which shows that estimated rates of hepatitis C infection among pregnant women in the United States have nearly doubled during 2009–2014. In Tennessee, the rate in 2014 was approximately three times the national rate.

“NACCHO is committed to supporting local health department efforts to address viral hepatitis. We created an online educational series to increase local health department knowledge and capacity to address hepatitis C, which includes examples of how local health departments can leverage existing resources to support their efforts and promote sensible policies in the age of curative treatment for hepatitis C. And, of course, we will continue to use advocacy to call attention to the unique needs of local health departments, who are the first line of defense in protecting community health.”

Click [here](#) to learn more about NACCHO’s hepatitis C resources and [view the latest NACCHO Exchange](#), which includes information on the connections between the opioid epidemic and the spread of infectious diseases, such as HCV.

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About NACCHO

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) represents the nation's nearly 3,000 local governmental health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote

health and well-being for all people in their communities. For more information about NACCHO, please visit www.naccho.org.