



National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**May Is Hepatitis Awareness Month:
How Local Health Departments Protect Their Communities**

**By Lori Tremmel Freeman, MBA, CEO
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Washington, DC, May 29, 2018 – May is Hepatitis Awareness Month, representing an important time to highlight this hidden epidemic by raising awareness of viral hepatitis and its impact in the United States, encouraging people to get tested and vaccinated, and educating people about the availability of effective care and curative treatment. [The National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) (NACCHO), representing the nation’s nearly 3,000 local governmental health departments, supports local efforts to address hepatitis and advocates for increased funding to address the growth of hepatitis in the U.S.

The most common types of hepatitis in the U.S. are hepatitis A virus (HAV), hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). While each can produce similar symptoms, each affects the liver differently, has different routes of transmission, and has different populations that are commonly affected. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, grey-colored stools, joint pain, and jaundice. Hepatitis A and B can be prevented with a vaccine.

HAV spreads through contaminated food or water, but generally causes no long-term effects and symptoms usually resolve within two months of infection. HBV and HCV can cause lifelong infection, scarring of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. HBV and HCV cause more than 20,000 deaths in the U.S. every year.

HBV and HCV are bloodborne viruses. HBV can also be transmitted through semen, saliva, and vaginal secretions. Chronic HBV can be treated and with the advent of new therapies, HCV can be cured, representing a major breakthrough in our ability to combat hepatitis.

People who inject drugs are at high risk for becoming infected with HBV and HCV through the sharing of needles and drug-preparation equipment. Baby boomers, those born from 1945-1965, are five times more likely to have HCV than other adults.

Local health departments are on the frontlines of addressing viral hepatitis through efforts including:

- **Surveillance:** Documenting the epidemiology of viral hepatitis, producing estimates of the incidence of HBV and HCV, and developing information about population-specific health disparities.
- **Vaccination & Testing:** Vaccinating people for hepatitis A and B, testing people for hepatitis B and C, and following up with persons with viral hepatitis and linking them to appropriate care and treatment.
- **Treatment:** Supporting access to HBV and HCV care and treatment.
- **Education & Prevention:** Developing and disseminating educational tools, trainings, and resources to increase community and healthcare provider awareness of prevention, testing, and treatment methods.
- **Outbreak Response:** Working to detect, investigate, respond to, and minimize the impact of possible outbreaks.
- **Elimination Planning:** Collaborating with federal, state, and community partners to develop coordinated, comprehensive, and integrated plans to eliminate HBV and HCV.

To support these efforts, resources must reach the local level. Funding to address viral hepatitis is severely limited, and particularly concerning in the face of the growing opioid

epidemic that is fueling increases in injection drug use. 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.

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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.