

Understanding Hepatitis and Liver Cancer in African Americans: Two Concerns and Two Solutions



Two Concerns:

African Americans and Hispanics are at higher risk of getting hepatitis C and liver cancer than Caucasians. Hepatitis C (HCV) generally requires direct contact with infected blood to obtain the infection. Common causes are from dirty needles such as used for drugs or for tattoos. Hepatitis B can be caught from contaminated blood products or used needles or sexual contact but is frequent among Asian children from contamination at birth.

Liver cancer usually occurs after liver scarring (cirrhosis) resulting

from alcoholism and/or hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis C can often leads to liver cancer without causing cirrhosis. Additionally, obesity and diabetes result in fatty liver with the disease leading to liver cancer as well.

Two Solutions:

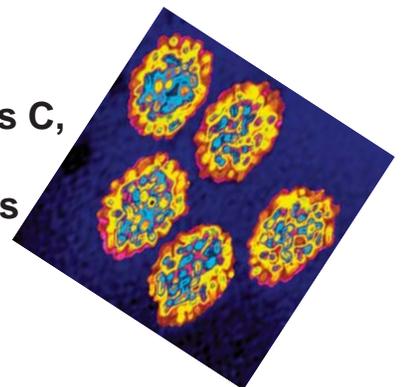
Live a healthy life style. Diet, exercise, weight control, avoidance of drugs and alcohol and careful use of sterile tattoo needles and ink can prevent most causes of hepatitis and liver cancer.

Get tested and treat for hepatitis.

Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Overview

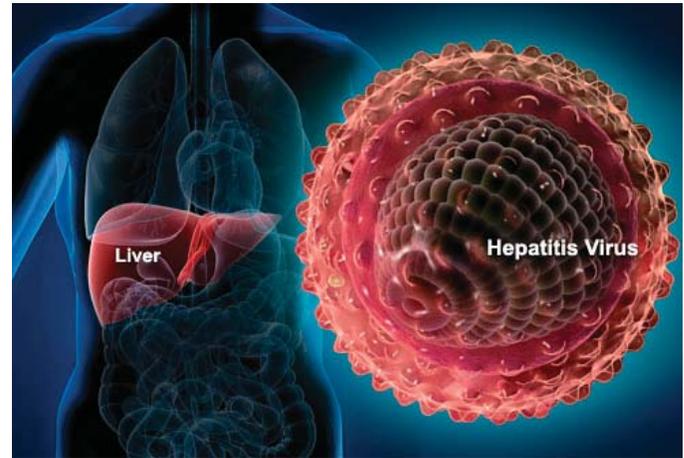
Hepatitis

Viral hepatitis, including hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, are distinct diseases that affect the liver and have different hepatitis symptoms and treatments. Other causes of hepatitis include recreational drugs and prescription medications. Hepatitis type is determined by laboratory tests.



Liver Cancer

Liver cancer is the fifth most common cancer in the world and the majority of patients with liver cancer will die within one year as a result. Patients with associated cirrhosis caused by chronic hepatitis B or C infections, alcohol, and hemochromatosis are at the greatest risk of developing liver cancer. Many patients with liver cancer do not develop symptoms until the advanced stages of the tumor



which usually makes prognosis poor. The combination of an imaging study (ultrasound, CT, or MRI scans) and an elevated blood level of alpha-fetoprotein will most effectively diagnose liver cancer, while a liver biopsy can make a definitive diagnosis

Hepatitis A

What Are the Symptoms of Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is inflammation of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus.

When symptoms occur, they may include:

Jaundice (condition causing yellow eyes and skin, dark urine)

- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Fever
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue



Children often have hepatitis A with few symptoms.

A person can spread the hepatitis A virus about 2 weeks before his or her symptoms appear and during the first week of having symptoms. People with no symptoms can also spread the virus.

How Is Hepatitis A Transmitted?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool of people with hepatitis A. It is spread from person to person by putting something in your mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person. Therefore, hepatitis A is most commonly transmitted in drinking water or food contaminated with the stool containing the virus. It is spread easily where there is poor sanitation or poor personal hygiene.

Other ways to get Hepatitis A include:

- Eating fruits, vegetables, or other foods that were contaminated during handling
- Eating raw shellfish harvested from water contaminated with the virus
- Swallowing contaminated water or ice

Who Is at Highest Risk of Hepatitis A?

- Those who are the highest risk of hepatitis A infection include:
- People living with or having sex with an infected person
- People traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common
- Men who have sex with men
- Injecting and noninjecting drug users
- Children and employees in child care settings

How Is Hepatitis A Diagnosed?

Blood tests can diagnose hepatitis A

Are There Any Long-Term Effects of Hepatitis A?

[Hepatitis A causes](#) acute (short-lived) infection. The liver heals itself over a few weeks to months. Usually the virus doesn't cause any long-term problems or complications. However, according to the CDC, 10% to 15% of people with hepatitis A will have prolonged or relapsing symptoms over a six- to nine-month period. Rarely, patients will develop acute [liver failure](#), which can be fatal, or require a liver transplant.

What's the Treatment for Hepatitis A?

There are no treatments that will cure hepatitis A. Your health care provider may monitor your liver function tests to be sure your body is healing appropriately.

Is There a Hepatitis A Vaccine?

Yes. Vaccination against hepatitis A is recommended for people older than 1 year old who:

- Are traveling to areas of the world with increased hepatitis A infection
- Are men who have sex with other men
- Have a blood clotting problem
- Are injecting and noninjecting drug users
- Have chronic liver disease

The vaccine is given in two divided doses.

Can Hepatitis A Be Prevented?

Vaccination is your best defense against hepatitis A. In addition, if you come in contact with someone with hepatitis A you can receive a specific medication called immune globulin within two weeks of contact.

Good hygiene is also important. Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, before and after handling food, and after changing a diaper.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the **liver**

Most adults who get it have it for a short time and then get better. This is called acute hepatitis B.

Sometimes the virus causes a long-term infection, called chronic hepatitis B. Over time, it can damage your **liver**. Babies and young children infected with the virus are more likely to get chronic hepatitis B.



You can have hepatitis B and not know it. You may not have symptoms. If you do, they can make you feel like you have the **flu**. But as long as you have the virus, you can spread it to others.

It's caused by the hepatitis B virus. It is spread through contact with the **blood** and body fluids of an infected person.

You may get hepatitis B if you:

- Have sex with an infected person without using a **condom**.
- Share needles (used for injecting **drugs**) with an infected person.
- Get a tattoo or piercing with tools that weren't sterilized.
- Share personal items like razors or **toothbrushes** with an infected person.

A mother who has the virus can pass it to her baby during delivery. Medical experts recommend that all **pregnant** women get tested for hepatitis B. If you have the virus, your baby can get shots to help prevent infection with the virus.

You **cannot** get hepatitis B from casual contact such as hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, or sharing food or drinks.

Many people with hepatitis B don't know they have it, because they don't have symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you may just feel like you have the flu.

Symptoms include:

- Feeling very tired.
- Mild fever.
- **Headache**.
- Not wanting to eat.
- Feeling sick to your **stomach** or **vomiting**.

Belly pain.

Diarrhea or **constipation**.

Muscle aches and joint pain.

Skin rash.

Yellowish **eyes** and **skin** (jaundice). Jaundice usually appears only after other symptoms have started to go away.



Most people with chronic hepatitis B have no symptoms.

A simple blood test can tell your doctor if you have the hepatitis B virus now or if you had it in the past. Your doctor also may be able to tell if you have had the vaccine to prevent the virus.

Hepatitis C

If your doctor thinks you may have liver damage from hepatitis B, he or she may use a needle to take a tiny sample of your liver for testing. This is called a **liver biopsy**.

Hepatitis C is a disease caused by a virus that infects the **liver**. In time, it can lead to permanent **liver** damage as well as **cirrhosis**, **liver cancer**, and **liver failure**.

Many people don't know that they have hepatitis C until they already have some liver damage. This can take many years. Some people who get hepatitis C have it for a short time and then get better. This is called acute hepatitis C. But most people who are infected with the virus go on to develop long-term, or chronic, hepatitis C.

Although hepatitis C can be very serious, most people can manage the disease and lead active, full lives.

Hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus. It is spread by contact with an infected person's **blood**.

You can get hepatitis C if:

You share needles and other equipment used to inject illegal **drugs**. This is the most common way to get hepatitis C in the United States.

You had a blood transfusion or **organ transplant** before 1992. As of 1992 in the United States, all donated blood and organs are screened for hepatitis C.

You get a shot with a needle that has infected blood on it. This happens in some developing countries where they use needles more than once when giving shots.

You get a tattoo or a piercing with a needle that has infected blood on it. This can happen if equipment isn't cleaned properly after it is used.

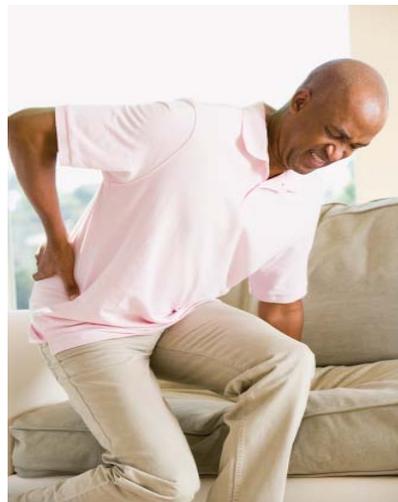
In rare cases, a mother with hepatitis C spreads the virus to her baby at birth, or a **health care** worker is accidentally exposed to blood that is infected with hepatitis C.

Experts aren't sure if you can get hepatitis C through sexual contact. If there is a risk of getting the virus through sexual contact, it is very small. The risk is higher if you have many sex partners.

You cannot get hepatitis C from casual contact such as hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, or sharing food or drink.

Most people have no symptoms when they are first infected with the hepatitis C virus. If you do develop symptoms, they may include:

- Feeling very tired.
 - Joint pain.
 - Belly pain.
 - **Itchy skin**.
 - Sore muscles.
 - Dark urine.
 - Yellowish **eyes** and **skin** (**jaundice**).
- Jaundice usually appears only after other symptoms have started to go away.



Most people go on to develop **chronic hepatitis C** but still don't have symptoms. This makes it common for people to have hepatitis C for 15 years or longer before it is diagnosed.

Many people find out by accident that they have the virus. They find out when their blood is tested before a [blood donation](#) or as part of a routine checkup. Often people with hepatitis C have high levels of liver enzymes in their blood.

Liver Cancer and Hepatitis

Hepatitis B and C: Risk of Liver Cancer

People who are infected with [hepatitis B](#) virus (HBV) or [hepatitis C](#) (HCV) virus may develop a chronic infection that can lead to [cirrhosis](#). The damage that results increases the risk of [liver cancer](#) (hepatocellular [carcinoma](#)).

The risk of [liver cancer](#) is greater for people who have chronic HBV or HCV infection than for the general population.¹

If you have chronic HBV infection:

You may develop liver cancer even if you do not have [cirrhosis](#). But most people who have HBV and liver cancer also have cirrhosis.

Receiving antiviral therapy to treat chronic HBV infection may lower your risk for developing liver cancer.

If you have chronic HCV infection:

- The strain (genotype) of HCV infection does not appear to affect your risk for developing liver cancer.
- You are not at significant risk of developing cancer unless you also already have cirrhosis.

You are at greatly increased risk of liver cancer if you have alcohol-related cirrhosis in addition to [hepatitis](#).

Receiving antiviral therapy to treat chronic HCV infection may lower your risk for developing liver cancer.²

Screening with [ultrasound](#) of the liver, [liver function tests](#), and [blood](#) tests (including alpha-fetoprotein [AFP]) every 6 to 12 months is recommended for people at risk of liver cancer.

The global epidemic of hepatitis B and C is a serious public health problem. Hepatitis B and C are the major causes of chronic liver disease and liver cancer in the world. In the next 10 years, 150,000 people in the United States will die from liver disease or

liver cancer associated with chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) or hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections. Today, between 800,000 and 1.4 million people in the United States have chronic hepatitis B and between 2.7 and 3.9 million have chronic hepatitis C. People most at risk for hepatitis B and C often are the least likely to have access to medical services. Reducing the rates of illness and death associated with these diseases will require greater awareness and knowledge among health care workers, improved identification of at-risk people, and improved access to medical care.

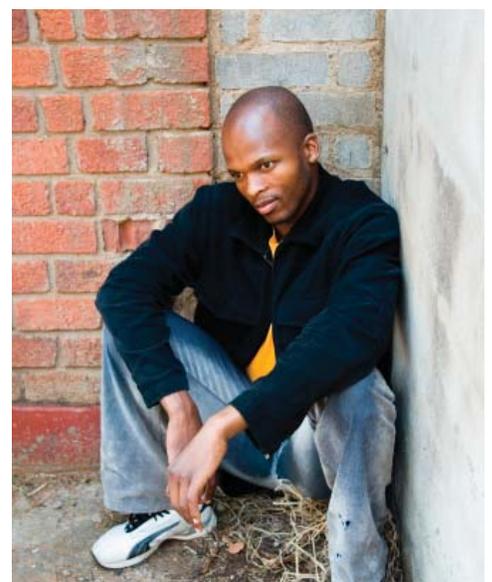
Hepatitis B is a vaccine-preventable disease. Although federal public health officials recommend that all newborns, children, and at-risk adults receive the vaccine, about 46,000 new acute cases of the HBV infection emerge each year, including 1,000 in infants who acquire the infection during birth from their HBV-positive mothers. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C, which is transmitted by direct exposure to infectious blood.

Hepatitis and Liver Cancer identifies missed opportunities related to the prevention and control of HBV and HCV infections. The book presents ways to reduce the numbers of new HBV and HCV infections and the morbidity and mortality related to chronic viral hepatitis. It identifies priorities for research, policy, and action geared toward federal, state, and local public health officials, stakeholder, and advocacy groups and professional organizations.

Hepatitis and African Americans

Hepatitis B infection has dropped significantly since 1991, but remains an area of concern for the African American population.

- In 2010, non-Hispanic Blacks were 1.5 times as likely to die from viral hepatitis, as compared to non-Hispanic Whites.
- Among all ethnic groups in 2011, African Americans had the highest rate of Hepatitis B.
- African Americans were twice as likely to develop Hepatitis B, in 2011, than the White population.
- African Americans between the ages of 19-24 were three times more likely to have Hepatitis B, in Death Rates:



African American and Liver Cancer by the Numbers

African-Americans with early stage liver cancer were more likely than white patients to die from their disease, according to a new study. Five years after diagnosis, 18 percent of white liver cancer patients were alive but only 15 percent of Hispanic patients and 12 percent of black patients were. Median survival times ranged from 10 months for whites and Hispanics to 8 months for blacks. The researchers also found racial and ethnic disparities in how often patients received treatment, with black and Hispanic patients less likely than whites to have any kind of treatment.

Black people with early stage liver cancer were more likely than white patients to die from their disease, according to a new study from the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center.

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When researchers looked at survival only among patients who had been treated, the disparity in survival persisted, but the gap narrowed, especially for Hispanics. Blacks who had surgery lived a median 29 months, Hispanics 40 months and whites 43 months. Median survival for all races was only four to six months without treatment.

“Just under a third of the patients we looked at received treatment, which is a significant underuse of appropriate interventions for the most treatable stages of liver cancer,” says study author Christopher J. Sonnenday, M.D., M.H.S., assistant professor of surgery at the U-M Medical School and assistant professor of health management and policy at the U-M School of Public Health.

Researchers looked at data from 13,244 patients with early stage hepatocellular carcinoma, or liver cancer. Patients were identified through the Surveillance and Epidemiology End Results registry, a database from the National Cancer Institute that collects information on cancer incidence, prevalence and survival.

Results of the study appear in the December issue of Archives of Surgery.

Liver cancer incidence is increasing, and the disease is difficult to treat in its later stages. Patients diagnosed with advanced disease have only a 5 percent chance of living five years after diagnosis. Early stage disease is more treatable, with options including tumor ablation, surgery to remove a portion of the liver or liver transplant surgery.

“Liver cancer requires highly complex care that is available only in larger referral hospitals. Our study suggests that not only do members of different racial and ethnic groups face barriers to accessing this care, but the survival of blacks and Hispanics even after receiving these treatments appears to be inferior to whites,” Sonnenday says.

Liver cancer statistics: About 24,000 Americans will be diagnosed with liver cancer this year and 18,900 will die from the disease, according to the American Cancer Society