

HEPATITIS C VIRUS CO-INFECTION

What you should know:

- Both HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) can be transmitted by exposure to infected blood and through sexual contact;
- Both HIV and HCV can be prevented by decreasing exposure to infected blood (e.g., using new sterile syringes and not sharing injection equipment);
- It is estimated that 50 to 80 percent of injection drug users (IDUs) who are HIV positive also have HCV infection;
- Recent research has found increased evidence of sexual transmission of HCV among HIV-positive men who have sex with men;
- Symptoms associated with HCV infection (fatigue, abdominal bloating, flu-like symptoms, jaundice) are present in only 20 to 30 percent of cases; therefore, most infections go undiagnosed until liver disease develops often 20 to 30 years later;
- HCV may cause serious liver damage and is the leading reason for liver transplants in the United States;
- People with HIV who contract HCV may develop liver disease more quickly than people who are infected with HCV alone;
- Liver disease is now one of the leading causes of death for people with HIV; and
- Effective treatments for HCV are available.

What we know about HIV and HCV testing and treatment:

Offering HCV testing in conjunction with HIV counseling and testing (C&T) has proven to be an effective prevention strategy for identifying infected individuals and providing referrals for treatment. Results from an HCV C&T demonstration project in 2003 included the following:

- HIV testing rates among IDUs nearly doubled when HIV C&T was offered in conjunction with HCV C&T;
- HIV test disclosure return rates increased by 21 percent among IDUs when individuals were able to receive both their HCV and HIV test results; and
- IDUs were more interested in their HCV status than their HIV status.

What the Office of AIDS (OA) is doing - HCV testing:

In January 2008, OA integrated HCV testing into the HIV C&T program. HIV C&T services are provided by over 50 local health departments (LHDs) and their subcontractors at both anonymous and confidential public health clinics and other sites in California. Funding has been made available through the HIV C&T program for HCV C&T services in communities with higher rates of HCV infection; in areas with lower infection rates, OA provides funds to help LHDs develop effective systems of referral for



HCV testing and medical care. HIV test counselors have been trained to offer HCV C&T; in addition, online HCV training for HIV counselors is available through the [AIDS Health Project Online Training Center](#). OA collects self-reported data through the C&T program which includes information on hepatitis A virus (HAV), hepatitis B virus (HBV), and HCV infection, as well as past HAV and HBV vaccination. This data is used to monitor program effectiveness as well as to enhance integration efforts.

Treatment:

Current HCV medications can successfully treat a significant percentage of infected individuals. The AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) makes available five drugs for the treatment of HCV for its HIV co-infected clients. These drugs are: interferon alfacon 1, interferon alfa-2a, interferon alfa-2b, pegylated interferon, and ribavirin. Individuals co-infected with HCV and HIV may be eligible for services provided through the AIDS Case Management Program or AIDS Medi-Cal AIDS Waiver Program. Clients are provided referrals to specialists who can monitor and treat HCV while also addressing HIV/AIDS. Clients infected with HCV, but not HIV, are referred to community-based resources for follow-up testing, vaccination, social support, and care; however, treatment resources for uninsured individuals with HCV are currently limited.

Education and prevention:

OA provides viral hepatitis education materials through the [California AIDS Clearinghouse](#), where materials may be obtained free-of-charge for all LHDs and their subcontractors.

Helpful resources:

- For more information on OA's mission, programs, and other helpful resources, see Web site: www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/AIDS.
- For more information about HCV treatment resources for co-infected ADAP clients contact Ramsell Public Health Rx at (888) 311-7632 or visit www.publichealthrx.com/CA_ADAP.html.
- For additional treatment information, education, and training resources, see the following Web sites:
 - The California Department of Public Health, Office of Viral Hepatitis Prevention: www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Pages/ovhp.aspx.
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm; and Hepatitis C Support Project: www.hcvadvocate.org.
 - American Liver Foundation: www.liverfoundation.org.
- For information about testing for HIV/AIDS/STDs and hepatitis, call:
 - *California HIV/AIDS/STD Hotline* at (800) 367-AIDS (2437) [English/Spanish] or (888) 225-AIDS (TDD) or see Web site: www.AIDShotline.org.
 - *National AIDS Hotline* at (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636) (English/Spanish) or (888) 232-6348 (TDD): www.hivtest.org.
- For more information about HCV and men who have sex with men: www.stdcheckup.org/provider/media/screen_hepatitis.pdf.
- For more information about the HCV Integration Pilot Program, see Public Health Reports, Volume 122, Supplement 2, [Integrating Viral Hepatitis Prevention into Public Health Settings](#).
- For information about alcohol and drug treatment, visit the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs Web site: www.adp.ca.gov/treatment.