

Health Awareness

3.5 Million Americans Are Living With The Number One Cause Of Liver Cancer—And Many Don't Know It

The Story Behind Chronic Hepatitis C Your Past History Connects To Your Current Health

(NAPSA)—As a medical specialist in the Army Special Forces in the early 70s, Edward Hartnett received multiple needle sticks during the course of duty.

But he never thought they would lead to a potentially life-threatening liver disease. Experiencing no symptoms, Hartnett was not aware he contracted the chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) until he attempted to donate blood years later.

HCV is Simple to Get and Transmit

Baby boomers, or people born between 1945 and 1965, are disproportionately affected by HCV, accounting for 81 percent of adults with the virus.¹ HCV is often transmitted through blood transfusions and organ transplants before the availability of widespread screening of the blood supply in 1992.² HCV also can be spread via contaminated needles from tattoos, needle sticks or intravenous drug use.²

HCV is Simple to Ignore

As in Hartnett's case, HCV is often a "silent disease" with no noticeable symptoms. About 50 percent of those infected are unaware they have the virus, making testing for HCV vitally important.³ And while testing isn't part of a routine physical, it's relatively easy. Physicians use a simple blood test to determine if a person has been infected.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following people be tested for HCV.¹

- Anyone born from 1945–1965
- Anyone who received donated blood or organs before 1992
- Health and safety workers who have been exposed to blood on the job through a needle stick or injury with a sharp object
- Anyone born to a mother with hepatitis C
- Anyone with certain medical conditions, such as chronic liver disease or HIV
- Anyone with abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- Anyone on hemodialysis
- Anyone who has injected drugs, even if just once or many years ago.

Yet the Impact is Not-So-Simple

Unfortunately, stories like Hartnett's are not uncommon. HCV is the most prevalent chronic blood-borne infection in the U.S.,⁴ affecting nearly 3.5 million Americans,² and is ten times more infectious than HIV.⁵ It causes approximately 15,000 deaths each year² and there are an estimated 17,000 new infections each year.⁵



Houston resident and former HCV patient, Edward Hartnett.

When symptoms do occur, they may include fatigue, joint pain, nausea, vomiting, fever, loss of appetite and abdominal pain.²

With up to 70 percent of patients progressing to chronic liver disease, HCV is a major cause of liver failure and liver-related death, and is the number one cause of cirrhosis and liver cancer in the U.S.²

There is Now Hope for People with HCV

Now the good news: Thanks to newly-available and highly-effective treatment options, HCV can be cured—meaning the virus is undetectable in the blood when checked three months or more after treatment is completed.⁶ Scientific advances in the last few years have resulted in treatments that are shorter and more effective than in previous years, and offer cure rates of more than 90 percent. If testing indicates a person is infected with HCV, it is important to consult a hepatitis C specialist to discuss the opportunity for treatment and cure. The American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and the Infectious Disease Society of America recommend treatment for all patients with chronic hepatitis C.⁶

"I knew that HCV wasn't going to defeat me, but it was something definitely hanging over my head—knowing I could go into liver failure, liver cancer, cirrhosis and ultimately death," Hartnett said. Now cured, he encourages anyone who thinks they may be at risk to be screened and importantly, if diagnosed, seek care from a specialist. "Today's the day to change your life. There are more HCV treatment options available than in years past. I want to go out and tell everyone who has HCV, 'what are you waiting for?'"

To learn more about HCV, visit HepCHope.com.

1. CDC. *Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Fact Sheet*. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/fact-sheets/viralhep-liver-cancer.pdf>. Accessed March 30, 2016.

2. CDC. *Hepatitis C FAQs for the Public*. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm>. Accessed March 30, 2016.

3. Denniston M, Klevens R, McQuillan G, Jiles R (2012). *Hepatology*. Awareness of infection, knowledge of hepatitis C, and medical follow-up among individuals testing positive for hepatitis C: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2001-2008.

4. CDC. *2010 STD Treatment Guidelines: Hepatitis C*. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/hepc.htm>. Accessed March 30, 2016.

5. AIDS Info. *Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Opportunistic Infections in HIV-Infected Adults and Adolescents*. <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/guidelines/html/4/adult-and-adolescent-oi-prevention-and-treatmentguidelines/345/hcv>. Accessed March 30, 2016.

6. *Journal of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases*. *Hepatitis C Guidance: AASLD-IDS Recommendations for Testing, Managing, and Treating Adults Infected with Hepatitis C Virus*. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/hep.27950/pdf>. Accessed March 31, 2016.