

Hepatitis B Virus and Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians & Pacific Islanders

Overview

Up to 2 million people are living with chronic hepatitis B in the U.S.. Hepatitis B and C are leading causes of preventable death worldwide and are more common than HIV/AIDS. Yet, because hepatitis B (HBV) often presents no symptoms, most people who have it are unaware until they develop liver cancer or liver disease many years later. It is estimated that there are 43,000 (2007) new HBV infections and 5,000 deaths annually. A new Institute Of Medicine (IOM) report concludes that viral hepatitis programs have inadequate resources and the current approach to the prevention and control of chronic hepatitis B is not working.

The IOM recommendations would help eliminate gaps in HBV surveillance, health care provider and the public's knowledge, prevention, and care which are major problems in AA & NHOPI communities. More than 50% of Americans living with chronic hepatitis B are AA & NHOPI Americans who only account for 4.5% of the general U.S. population (IOM, 2010). An estimated 65% of those infected are unaware. And even for those who have been diagnosed, many still don't get the health care services they need. In order to address HBV in AA & NHOPI communities, it is critical to work together on a coordinated response that includes the community, health care & public health professionals, and the federal government.

How Hepatitis B Impacts AA & NHOPI Communities

Individual / Community Health Factors:

- Hepatitis B is vaccine-preventable. The vaccine is an anti-cancer vaccine because it prevents HBV related liver cancer.
- AA & NHOPIs are often unaware of their risk: A study among Chinese Americans showed fewer than ½ had been tested or vaccinated and 65% of those who were chronically infected were not aware of their infection.
- There are 37 million foreign born residents in the U.S. (12% of U.S. population). Nearly half of foreign-born residents come from countries with high rates of HBV (6% of total population).

Health Provider Factors:

- Knowledge about chronic hepatitis B and C among healthcare providers, particularly primary-care providers and social-service providers is generally poor.
- Although it is recommended to test household contacts of HBV positive people, fewer than 50% are tested and fewer than 50% of those tested and found to be negative are vaccinated.
- A study of 100 OB/GYNs showed a low overall knowledge and only 62% referred their HBV infected pregnant patients for chronic hepatitis management.
- These lapses result in about 1,000 cases of chronic HBV infections in newborns each year.

Cost Factors:

- Routine testing of all adult AA and NHOPI Americans for HBV is cost effective.
- It is estimated that prevention of perinatal HBV infection would save \$41.8 million in medical and work-loss costs and routine vaccination of infants would provide an additional savings of \$19.7 million.

These facts are from: Hepatitis and Liver Cancer: A National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Hepatitis B and C available at www.iom.edu/reports. Released: January 11, 2010

The IOM report recommendations would help AA & NHOPI communities by:

- **eliminating perinatal (mother-to-infant) HBV transmission,**
 - All infants born to women with chronic hepatitis B should receive hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immune globulin in the delivery room. Following this recommendation will eliminate perinatal hepatitis B transmission.
 - The CDC should do more to improve perinatal hepatitis B prevention programs.
- **preventing transmission through vaccination,**
 - All states should require the hepatitis B vaccine series as a requirement for school attendance.
 - Additional resources should be used to increase hepatitis B vaccination of at-risk adults.
- **increasing the number of chronically infected individuals who receive medical care.**
 - The CDC should work with community and government leaders to develop and evaluate effective outreach and education programs targeting health care, social service providers, and at-risk populations to increase awareness about hepatitis B and hepatitis C.
 - The CDC should expand of community programs that provide hepatitis B screening, testing, and vaccination programs targeting foreign-born populations.

Simple steps you can take to fight hepatitis B:

- ✓ **Know your HBV status. Getting tested is quick and easy.**
- ✓ **Talk with your family and community about HBV.**
- ✓ **Make sure all of your children receive their HBV vaccinations.**
- ✓ **Find ways to educate your community about hepatitis B (e.g., community centers, health fairs).**
- ✓ **Find state and community programs that have HBV activities and volunteer.**