



Campaign for a Healthier New Jersey

Hepatitis C in New Jersey

New Jersey is facing a growing epidemic of hepatitis C, 60% of which is related to injection drug use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that up to 80% of injection drug users nationally are infected with hepatitis C. It is estimated that over 144,000 New Jerseyans are infected with the hepatitis C virus, resulting in over 450 of deaths per year. Because not everyone who is carrying the virus knows they are infected, they often lose valuable time in getting treatment and unknowingly pass the virus on to others. In addition, hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver transplants. Because of this, the increase in hepatitis C infections has caused the waiting list for liver transplants to triple in the last five years.

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, and so our best strategy is prevention. Other than injection drug users, individuals considered to be at high risk for hepatitis C infection include police officers, firefighters, health care workers, and corrections officers who frequently come into contact with infected individuals.

In addition to the human cost of hepatitis C infection, the spread of the disease is costing New Jersey millions of dollars a year in medical costs. The Department of Corrections recently announced that it would cost between 4 and 8 million dollars a year just to treat the inmates in prison who are infected with hepatitis C. Health care costs to treat hepatitis C in the general population in New Jersey will run into the hundreds of millions of dollars. The average lifetime cost of treating a person infected with hepatitis C is \$100,000 if the person does not require a liver transplant. Costs including a liver transplant are at least double that.

These human and economic costs are preventable.

Access to sterile syringes has been shown to prevent the spread of hepatitis C.

The time to act is now!

Up to 80% of injection drug users nationally are infected with hepatitis C.

— *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

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— *New Jersey Department of Corrections*

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