

May 2024

UI HEALTH CARE ORGAN TRANSPLANT CENTER

Chronic viral hepatitis B (HBV) and C (HCV) are among the most frequent causes of cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver transplantation. In 2022 alone there were roughly 30,000 new cases of HBV and 160,000 of HCV estimated nationally. Knowing how to prevent the spread and treat viral hepatitis can make a significant impact in our public health.

HBV is most often spread from mother to child around the time of birth, in what is called vertical transmission. However, it can be spread through intimate partner contact or contact with blood. Fortunately, the spread of HBV can be stopped through good pre-natal health care and childhood vaccination. HCV seems to most commonly be spread through contact with blood. Generally, blood contact can come through occupations like health care, blood transfusions before 1992 when we adopted better screening methods, and injected substance use—which is the most common exposure. There is no vaccine to immunize against the spread of HCV.

Treatments are different for chronic viral hepatitis. HBV is generally treated with a once daily antiviral tablet medication, often there is a risk of a severe recurrence if treatment is stopped even after many years. HCV is now most often cured after two to three months of once daily tablet medications, which is a drastic improvement from the treatment about 10 years ago. At that time HCV was treated with roughly one year of weekly medication injections and twice daily tablets, and was marred by significant side effects with viral eradication being uncommon.

The best way to stop viral hepatitis is to prevent it. Ask your doctor if you have risk factors and ensure you and your loved ones are immunized against HBV. We should work to identify new cases of viral hepatitis; with modern treatments we can prevent the spread and decrease the risks of cancer and liver failure.

- Alan Gunderson, MD
Gastroenterology and Hepatology

Hepatitis Awareness Month

Hepatitis Awareness Month occurs every May, with National Hepatitis Testing Day on May 19. During the month of May, health professionals work to raise awareness of risk factors, encourage testing and vaccination, improve understanding of the disease, and decrease the social stigma associated with hepatitis. For more information or questions, click [here](#).

There are several different viruses that can cause hepatitis. The most common types are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Hepatitis A and B are both preventable through safe and effective vaccines. The CDC recommends that adults through age 59 those 60 or over with risk factors receive a vaccination.

Hepatitis C is curable with prescribed treatment. The only way to know if you have hepatitis B or C is through testing. The CDC recommends that all adults get tested for hepatitis B and C at least once in their lifetime and pregnant women get tested during each pregnancy.

Why should I care about hepatitis?

Every year, thousands of people become infected with viral hepatitis in the United States. Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne illness in the U.S. The CDC estimates that currently 4.25 to 8.2 million people in the U.S. are currently living with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C chronic infections. Hepatitis infections can be prevented and/or cured, depending on which virus someone is infected with. For more information, please see the attached table that provides an overview of the three most common types—hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) notes that between 45% to 85% of people with chronic hepatitis C are unaware that they have this infection. Hepatitis C infections are on the rise among young adults. According to IDPH, a large factor in the rising infection rates is injection drug use as well as the abuse of opioids—nearly 80% of Iowans under age 40 who were diagnosed with hepatitis C reported injecting drugs.

Transplant Games of America

The Transplant Games of America occur every other summer to bring together transplant recipients, living donors, donor families, caregivers, and transplant professionals from across the country. This year, they are held in Birmingham, AL from July 5-10, 2024.

The 2024 Transplant Games offers 20 different competitions and more than 60 special events. Some of these events include the opening ceremonies, donor tribute, 5K run/walk, the TGA Village, and coffee houses.

If you have any questions or want to get involved with Team Iowa, contact Anna Hobart (Iowa Donor Network) at ahobart@iadrn.org or 319-631-7436.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This section of our monthly newsletter will focus on support and resources offered both by the Organ Transplant Center and throughout the nation. Please utilize these as you need them and reach out with any questions!

Kidney line: 319-356-1136

Liver line: 319-356-1137

Medicare and Transplant

Medicare eligibility is based on age, disability, or ESRD. Kidney transplant is an exception to Medicare enrollment. All other organ transplants will need to have Medicare at time of transplant. There is a 1-year enrollment window for Medicare from date of transplant. Delaying enrollment can increase chances of higher out-of-pocket expenses for anti-rejection medication. Medicare Advantage plans cover anti-rejection medications, and out-of-pocket expenses are subject to plan.

* For further questions or coverage changes, please contact the Organ Transplant Center financial counselors.

Video Resources

The Organ Transplant Center has put together videos to better explain the transplant evaluation process and provide additional patient education. Please click the links below to access these videos.

- [Kidney Transplant - Patient Education Videos](#)
- [Liver Transplant - Patient Education Videos](#)
- [Pancreas Transplant - Patient Education Videos](#)

Organ Transplant Support Group

Starting in February 2024, the Organ Transplant Center will begin having our support group every other month. The support group will also be a hybrid version—both in-person and by Zoom. Each group will be focused on a specific topic, with speakers followed by time for discussion. If you have any questions, please contact 319-467-8385.

Location:

Iowa Donor Network
550 Madison Avenue
North Liberty, IA 52317

Date:

June 13, 2024
Speaker – Iowa Donor
Network staff

Zoom Information:

Meeting ID: 959 4042 7920
Passcode: 678643

We will be having an indoor picnic at this meeting, so be sure to bring something to eat!

Additional Resources

Social Security Disability

- [Adult Disability Starter Kit](#)
- [SSI Child Disability Starter Kit](#)

National Living Donor Assistance Center (NLDAC):
[How to Apply](#)

Iowa Anatomical Gift Fund: [Application](#)

Iowa Donor Network / Writing Your Donor Family:
<https://www.iowadonornetwork.org/transplant-recipients/writing-your-donor-family>