



STATE OF MICHIGAN

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

ELIZABETH HERTEL
DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 18, 2021

CONTACT: Chelsea Wuth
517-241-2112
WuthC@michigan.gov

Governor Whitmer declares May as Hepatitis Awareness Month

Adults ages 18 and older should be tested for HCV at least once in a lifetime, and all women should be tested for HCV during each pregnancy

LANSING, Mich. – Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has proclaimed May as Hepatitis Awareness Month to encourage Michiganders to get tested for hepatitis C (HCV). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now [recommends universal hepatitis C testing](#) among all adults ages 18 years and older, and among all women during every pregnancy.

“It is crucial that all Michiganders receive Hepatitis C Virus testing at least one time in their life, and more frequently if they are in an at-risk category,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. “HCV is curable, and we are committed to making both testing and treatment accessible for all residents in need.”

The hepatitis C virus is spread through contact with blood from an infected person. Most people who are exposed to the virus will develop long-term HCV infection, which causes damage to the liver and can lead to serious, even life-threatening health problems like cirrhosis and liver cancer. HCV is easily diagnosed with a simple blood test; however, because persons can live with hepatitis C for years or decades without experiencing any symptoms, opportunities to test and cure infection early are missed.

Over 100,000 Michiganders are known to be infected with hepatitis C, but national estimates indicate that only 50% of persons impacted by the virus have been tested and are aware of their infection, suggesting that the prevalence of HCV in Michigan could be upwards of 200,000. There is no vaccine for HCV, but there are medications that can cure HCV infection in eight to 12 weeks. HCV cure eliminates the virus from the blood and prevents an individual from being able to transmit HCV to others.

To achieve hepatitis C elimination, MDHHS released a [state plan](#) outlining important strategies to increase access to HCV testing and treatment. On April 1, 2021, the MDHHS launched the [We Treat Hep C Initiative](#), an initiative to increase access to curative HCV treatments and expand provider capacity to test and treat individuals with HCV infection.

Early detection, linkage to care and treatment are key to identifying current HCV infection and slowing disease progression and liver damage. Identification of persons living with hepatitis C will be critical to achieving hepatitis C elimination.

In recognition of May as Hepatitis Awareness Month and May 19 as Hepatitis Testing Day, MDHHS encourages the following persons to ask their health care provider for a simple blood test for hepatitis C:

- All adults, at least once in their lifetime
- All women during each pregnancy
- All persons with recognized conditions or exposures, regardless of age
- All persons with ongoing risk factors (routine periodic testing)

Hepatitis C elimination is achievable with direct-acting antivirals effective at virtually curing individuals of their hepatitis C infection. Contact your local health department or primary care provider to get tested.

#