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Hep B United Applauds U.S. Preventive Services Task Force for Hepatitis B Screening Recommendation

New Recommendation Makes Hepatitis B Testing in High-Risk Communities an Urgent Public Health Priority

Washington, DC – Hep B United, a national coalition co-chaired by the Hepatitis B Foundation and the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) applauds the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) for recommending screening for hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in persons at high risk, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs).

“We are very pleased with the Task Force’s final recommendation statement and stand ready to support our health care providers with the information and tools necessary to ensure full implementation of the recommendation,” said Joan M. Block, RN, BSN, executive director of the Hepatitis B Foundation and co-chair of Hep B United. “This recommendation is a critical breakthrough for the public health community and will give all of us who have been working in high-risk communities greater leverage to improve screening, access to care and treatment for those living with chronic hepatitis B infections.”

APIs in particular, while comprising 5 percent of the total population in the United States, account for more than 50 percent of Americans living with chronic hepatitis B.

The final USPSTF “B grade” recommendation applies to non-pregnant teens and adults at high risk of becoming infected with hepatitis B. Those at high risk for infection include people born in countries where the prevalence of hepatitis B is greater than 2%, people born in the U.S. who were not vaccinated in infancy and whose parents are from a country with a high prevalence, people with HIV infection, injection drug users, people living with or having sex with people infected with hepatitis B, and men who have sex with men.

Hepatitis B is common in many parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands. It is estimated that 1 in 12 APIs is living with hepatitis B, yet nearly 2 out of 3 do not know they are infected. Hepatitis B often displays no symptoms until serious liver damage has already occurred. APIs not born in the United States (or those whose parents were born outside of the U.S.) are at particularly high risk, due to high rates of hepatitis B in their native countries, where most people are unknowingly infected at birth from their mothers (e.g. perinatal HBV transmission).

Left untreated, up to 25 percent of people with hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including cirrhosis and liver cancer. Worldwide, liver cancer is the 2nd leading cause of cancer deaths, and 80% of these cases are due to HBV infections. Testing, therefore, is critical to identifying people living with chronic hepatitis B so they can access life-saving care and treatment to reduce the enormous burden of disease and premature death.

“Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, high-risk populations, including the 2 out of 3 AAPIs who are not aware of their hepatitis B status, will now have more opportunities to access early detection and preventive services with no out-of-pocket cost,” states Jeffrey B. Caballero, MPH, executive director of AAPCHO and co-chair of Hep B United.

“We are at a historic moment to address hepatitis B in the U.S. with national policy tools to support our work including this final recommendation and the updated U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Viral Hepatitis Action Plan,” said Kate Moraras, MPH, senior program director at the Hepatitis B Foundation and director of Hep B United. “The Task Force’s recommendation adds to the national momentum of our coalition partners’ efforts around the country to combat hepatitis B; we look forward to working together in the successful implementation of the recommendation.”

The Task Force’s final recommendation statement, including a consumer fact sheet is available [here](#).

About Hep B United

Hep B United is a national coalition to address the public health challenge of hepatitis B. The goal of Hep B United is to support local community coalition efforts across the U.S. to increase hepatitis B awareness, screening, vaccination and linkage to care for all Americans, but in particular, for high-risk Asian American and Pacific Islander populations who are disproportionately impacted. For more information on Hep B United, please visit <http://hepbunited.org>. To learn more about their partner coalitions, please visit <http://hepbunited.org/local-campaigns>.

About the Hepatitis B Foundation

Headquartered in Doylestown, Pa., the Hepatitis B Foundation is the only national nonprofit organization solely dedicated to finding a cure for hepatitis B and improving the quality of life for those affected worldwide through research, education and patient advocacy. To learn more, go to www.hepb.org, read our blog at <http://wp.hepb.org>, follow us on Twitter [@HepBFoundation](https://twitter.com/HepBFoundation), find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/hepbfoundation or call 215-489-4900.

About AAPCHO

AAPCHO is a national association of 34 community health organizations dedicated to promoting advocacy, collaboration, and leadership that improves the health status and access of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islanders in the U.S. For more information on AAPCHO and its Guiding Principles and Values, please visit www.aapcho.org.

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