

Hepatitis B

BACKGROUND

Approximately 350 million people worldwide are infected with hepatitis B, a deadly disease that often goes undetected despite the fact that it causes about 80% of all primary liver cancers. Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection is the primary cause of liver cancer, the second deadliest cancer in the United States. Hepatitis B, a liver disease caused by HBV, can lead to lifelong infection, scarring of the liver, liver cancer, and death. In the United States, it is estimated that 1 in 20 people will become infected with HBV, and 1 in 4 chronic hepatitis B carriers will die of liver cancer or liver failure. Within Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations, this “silent disease” has had an especially devastating health impact. AAPIs comprise more than half of the 2 million estimated hepatitis B carriers in the United States and, consequently, have the highest rate of liver cancer among all ethnic groups.

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) is spread through:

- infected blood.
- mother-to-child at birth (perinatal transmission). Perinatal transmission is the number one cause of hepatitis B transmission in the United States. Of children born to mothers infected by HBV, **90%** will also develop the infection.
- unprotected sex.

There is however, a vaccine to prevent HBV infection, and hence prevent liver cancer.

HEP B UNITED

AAPCHO and the Hepatitis B Foundation, with the support of the Office of Minority Health, launched Hep B United in May 2012. Hep B United is a national campaign to address the public health challenge of hepatitis B, the leading cause of liver cancer and a major health disparity among Asian Americans. Its goal is to support and leverage the success of local community coalitions across the United States to increase hepatitis B awareness, screening, vaccination and linkage to care for all Americans, but in particular, for high-risk Asian and Pacific Islander populations who are disproportionately impacted.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO:

In order to improve health outcomes in the area of hepatitis B, we must implement the following action steps:

- Support the President's FY2017 budget request of \$62.8 million dollars for the Centers for Disease Control's Division of Viral Hepatitis. Funds would help to support vital programs in screening, linkage-to-care, and to support a national surveillance system.
- Support implementation of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines on hepatitis B. We need to ensure that states cover screening services at little to no-cost.
- Join the Congressional Hepatitis Caucus. Contact Helen Beaudreau from Congressman Honda's office (Helen.Beaudreau@mail.house.gov) if interested.