



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH urges baby boomers be tested for hepatitis C

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health joins the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in recommending that all Americans born between 1945 and 1965 get a one-time test for hepatitis C.

“Many of the people with hepatitis C in Alabama are not aware they have it, and its prevalence among baby boomers is five times greater than in other adults,” Dr. Mary McIntyre, assistant state health officer for disease control and prevention, said. “A simple blood test will detect the virus.”

Before widespread testing of blood donations began in 1992, hepatitis C could be spread through blood transfusions. Many infected people, however, do not report a known exposure risk.

About 3 percent of baby boomers are infected with hepatitis C. People who have not been screened should get the blood test during their next visit to the doctor, said Dr. Thomas Frieden, CDC’s director.

Hepatitis C symptoms can take decades to emerge. The virus, which can gradually scar the liver and lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer, is the leading cause of liver transplants.

Today hepatitis C is commonly transmitted through sharing needles to inject drugs. Some experts suggest that in some cases hepatitis C could have spread through routes including shared razors and toothbrushes, manicures or sniffed cocaine.

Testing baby boomers can help avert major increases of liver disease and deaths--especially since new drug therapies can cure many more people than older therapies. Deaths from hepatitis C-related diseases have almost doubled from 1999 to 2007 and now amount to more than 15,000 U.S. deaths annually.

Concerned patients should talk to their health care provider about conducting a simple blood test to determine if they have ever been infected.

More information is available at adph.org/hepatitis/ and cdc.gov/hepatitis/.

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