

Jackson County Department of Public Health

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDS HEPATITIS TESTING FOR TARGET GROUPS

In honor of Hepatitis Awareness Month in May, the Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH) recommends that residents learn more about viral hepatitis as well as determine if they should get tested or vaccinated against this chronic disease. The most common types of viral hepatitis in the United States are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. While each can produce similar symptoms, each hepatitis virus affects the liver differently, has different transmission routes, and has different populations that are commonly affected.

North Carolina's hepatitis A and hepatitis B rates have declined by more than 65% between 1999 and 2008, largely attributed to vaccination practices. Yet since 2008, North Carolina has seen an increase in hepatitis C rates—an increase that has exceeded that of the United States. No vaccination exists to prevent hepatitis C.

Currently, JCDPH, as well as other Health Departments, offers free hepatitis B & C testing for patients who are uninsured and fall into additional categories. To find out if you are eligible for free testing, call 828-586-8994. Those who have private insurance may get tested for hepatitis B & C at the Health Department as well; their insurance will billed for the service and co-pays may incur.

The Health Department also offers the assistance of a Regional Hepatitis C Bridge Counselor who serves the eight counties west of Asheville (Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Macon, Swain, Jackson, Qualla Boundary, Haywood, and Transylvania). The Counselor will work to address the burden of hepatitis C by providing disease specific education to people infected with hepatitis C, linking people with hepatitis C to treatment providers, and collaborating with the community to build partnerships and resource networks.

For more information about getting tested for hepatitis or about the Regional Hepatitis C Bridge Counselor, call Sally Sutton at 828-587-8291.

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