



## 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.

The Appalachian region has rates of hepatitis B and hepatitis C higher than the US average. Hepatitis C can be a long-term chronic disease and likely leads to liver failure. Currently, hepatitis C is the most common bloodborne pathogen in the U.S. and the leading cause of liver cancer. The number of deaths related to hepatitis C in North Carolina have steadily decreased from 426 cases in 2018 to 351 cases in 2021. North Carolina's hepatology team has been focused on diagnosing and treating viral hepatitis across the state through Disease Control Specialists and Hepatitis C Bridge Counselors.

According to the American Liver Foundation, approximately 75% of people living with chronic hepatitis are unaware of their infection in the United States. For this reason, routine screening is recommended for all people between the ages of 18- 79. Currently, JCDPH, as well as other Health Departments, offer 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 be 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 828-587-8291 or 828-226-9844. The health department website may also be visited at <http://health.jacksonnc.org/hepatitis-c> for further details.

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