



Jackson County Department of Public Health

Anna Lippard
Deputy Health Director
828-587-8225

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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. Jackson County's rate of Hepatitis B infections have decreased by 50% between 2017 and 2021. As well, North Carolina's hepatitis A and hepatitis B rates have declined by more than 44% percent between 2016 and 2020, largely attributed to vaccination practices. Yet, since 2009, North Carolina has seen a 400% increase in acute hepatitis C—an increase that has exceeded that of the United States. Hepatitis C is the most common bloodborne pathogen in the U.S. and the leading cause of liver cancer. No vaccination is available for hepatitis C but treatment and support are available.

Approximately 40% of people living with chronic hepatitis are unaware of their infection. For this reason, routine screening is recommended for all people between the ages of 18- 79. Currently, JCDPH, as well as other North Carolina 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.

JCDPH 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 Katie Hutchinson at 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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