

# ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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### May is Hepatitis Awareness Month

The month of May is designated as Hepatitis Awareness Month in the United States. During May, the CDC, along with the Oneida County Health Department and community partners, work to shed light on this hidden epidemic by raising awareness of viral hepatitis and encouraging the people at high risk to get tested.

"Hepatitis" means inflammation of the liver and also refers to a group of viral infections that affect the liver. There are at least six different types of hepatitis (A-G), with the three most common types being Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. Hepatitis A is an acute infection and people usually improve without treatment. Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can cause a chronic, persistent infection, which can lead to chronic liver disease. Unfortunately, it is estimated that **up to 75% of those with chronic viral hepatitis don't know they have it** and aren't getting treatment or making the lifestyle changes necessary to protect their livers or prevent transmission to others. Viral hepatitis is the leading cause of liver cancer and the most common reason for liver transplants. An estimated 4.4 million Americans are living with chronic hepatitis; most do not know they are infected.

Hepatitis A is caused by the Hepatitis A virus. The virus enters through the mouth, multiplies in the body and is passed in the stool. The infection can be spread by direct contact with the Hepatitis A virus or when another person consumes food or drink handled by an infected person who does not practice good hygiene, such as handwashing. There is now a vaccine available to protect against Hepatitis A virus.

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease. Hepatitis B virus is transmitted through contact with blood, semen, and body fluids of an infected person. This can occur through direct blood-to-blood contact, sex, illicit drug use, and from an infected mother to her newborn during delivery. When first infected, a person can develop an "acute" infection, which can range from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get vaccinated.

Hepatitis C virus infection is the most common chronic bloodborne infection in the United States; approximately 3.2 million persons are chronically infected. Hepatitis C virus is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person; individuals who injected drugs are at highest risk for infection even if they injected only once many years ago. Another high risk group is baby boomers. More than 75% of adults infected are baby boomers, people born from 1945 through 1965. The reason that baby boomers have high rates of Hepatitis C is not completely understood. Most boomers are believed to have become infected in the 1970s and 1980s when rates of Hepatitis C were the highest. Since people with Hepatitis C can live for decades without symptoms, many baby boomers are unknowingly living with an infection they got many years ago. Most people with Hepatitis C don't know they are infected. **The only way to know if someone has Hepatitis C is to get tested.** New York State law requires a Hepatitis C screening test must be offered to every individual born between 1945 and 1965 receiving health services at a hospital or private providers office. Free and confidential Hepatitis C testing is offered Monday to Friday from 8:30 am-4:30 pm at ACR Health, 401 Columbian St. 2<sup>ND</sup> FL in Utica (315-793-0661). Testing is walk-in or by appointment.

Everyone should talk to a provider about their risk factors and whether or not they need to be tested for hepatitis. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from Hepatitis A and B disease.

For more information on Hepatitis:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/>

New York State Department of Health: [www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/hepatitis/](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/hepatitis/)

Oneida County Health Department: [www.ocgov.net](http://www.ocgov.net) or Call: 798-5747

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*"PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE HEALTH OF ONEIDA COUNTY"*