

Many more U.S. adults to get vaccinated against hepatitis B following move by CDC

The Hepatitis B Foundation and partners are forming an advisory council to promote implementation of the CDC's new hepatitis B vaccination recommendations.



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31, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Hepatitis B Foundation](#) enthusiastically endorses the adoption of new adult vaccination guidelines for hepatitis B by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Foundation is organizing a group of experts to help with implementation to ensure millions more U.S. adults get vaccinated against the dangerous virus.



These greatly expanded and simplified recommendations will improve access, make it easier to protect millions more Americans from hepatitis B, save countless lives and reduce health care costs."

*Chari Cohen, DrPH, MPH,
senior vice president,
Hepatitis B Foundation*

The CDC has announced that it has adopted formally the landmark recommendations (posted here) that came last November from its Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) in favor of universal hepatitis B vaccination for all adults ages 19 to 59 in the U.S. The CDC made [the announcement](#) in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR).

"This is a major step forward that the Hepatitis B Foundation had strongly advocated for over many years," said Chari Cohen, DrPH, MPH, senior vice president of the Foundation. "These greatly expanded and simplified recommendations will improve access and make it easier

to protect millions more Americans from hepatitis B. This will save countless lives and ultimately reduce health care costs."

The Hepatitis B Foundation will be convening a National Hepatitis B Vaccination Advisory Council, which will meet for the first time later this month, comprised of representatives of federal agencies, professional associations, public health organizations and health care providers. Dr. Cohen and Rita K. Kuwahara, MD, MPH, internal medicine physician and primary care health policy fellow at Georgetown University, will be the co-chairs. The advisory council's purpose is to develop implementation strategies, informational materials and tools, for

dissemination to providers and public health educators nationwide.

In the U.S., up to 2.4 million people are chronically infected with hepatitis B and thousands of people die each year from the infection. People living with untreated chronic hepatitis B have a 25% to 40% lifetime risk of developing liver cancer, which is a highly lethal disease.

Previously, hepatitis B immunization recommendations were based on a person's risk factors, which Dr. Cohen said was stigmatizing, inefficient and burdensome to providers and patients. Currently, only 30% of adults in the U.S. have been vaccinated against hepatitis B. In the past 10 years, rates of acute hepatitis B in the U.S. have steadily increased, especially among those age 40 and older. Universal vaccination initiatives are widely recognized in helping to reduce morbidity from viruses.

The Hepatitis B Foundation worked hard to help make the ACIP aware of the need for universal hepatitis B vaccination. The Foundation mobilized its team of advocates and supporters to make their voices heard through an online petition, organizational sign-on letter and public comments.

Michaela Jackson, MS, MPH, prevention policy manager at the Hepatitis B Foundation, led its advocacy effort for universal vaccination, and she expressed the Foundation's great appreciation to the ACIP.

"It has been frustrating to watch rates of infection rise when we know that there is a safe and effective vaccine that can prevent hepatitis B and liver cancer," Jackson said. "This recommendation will help remedy a very significant health inequity for marginalized groups and it will serve to make many adults in the U.S. safer."

The Hepatitis B Foundation's officials expressed disappointment that the ACIP's recommendation was not as inclusive as it could have been, stopping short of people older than 59, and pledged to continue advocating for greater access to hepatitis B vaccinations in the U.S.

According to the Hepatitis B Foundation, the CDC's simplified, updated recommendation will go a long way toward improving vaccination rates and protecting adults in the U.S.

What the recommendation means:

- All adults aged 19-59 can receive the HBV vaccination with no cost-sharing. Those who are 60 and older who wish to receive the hepatitis B vaccine but have no identified risk factors may still have to pay for the vaccine based upon insurance coverage.
- Financial and other systematic barriers to vaccine access will be eliminated for many adults.
- Access to the hepatitis B vaccine will increase; more providers will offer the vaccine, and it will be easier to get vaccinated.
- Health insurance coverage for the vaccine will improve.
- Progress toward our shared goal of eliminating viral hepatitis in the U.S. by 2030 will accelerate.

- Health disparities and new hepatitis B infections will be reduced.

Why is universal vaccination being recommended now? As many as 60 million Americans spanning 3 generations–Baby Boomers, Gen X, and some Millennials–were born before the recommendations for universal infant vaccination in 1991 and may not be protected against hepatitis B. Many people who have been infected do not have clear risk factors or may not be aware of the risk, and almost 85% of adults in the U.S. fall into a higher-risk group, including those with diabetes and kidney disease. Hepatitis B cases in the U.S. rose by 11% between 2014 and 2018 despite the presence of highly effective vaccines. Hepatitis B is one of the primary causes of liver cancer, one of the deadliest cancers, and it is a completely preventable disease; the need for universal vaccination can no longer be ignored.

About Hepatitis B: The most common serious liver infection in the world, it is caused by the hepatitis B virus, which attacks and injures the liver. As many as 840,000 people die from hepatitis B worldwide, even though it is preventable and treatable. Hepatitis B is a “silent epidemic” because most people do not have symptoms when they are newly or chronically infected. Thus, they can unknowingly infect others and continue the spread of hepatitis B. For people who are chronically infected but don’t have any symptoms, their livers are still being damaged silently, which can develop into serious liver disease such as cirrhosis or liver cancer.

About the Hepatitis B Foundation: We are the nation’s leading nonprofit organization solely dedicated to finding a cure for hepatitis B and improving the quality of life for those affected worldwide through research, education and patient advocacy. Founded in 1991, the Hepatitis B Foundation is based in Doylestown, Pa., with an office in Washington, D.C.

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