

## ***Idaho Viral Hepatitis - News***

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Boise, Idaho – Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver cancer and the number one cause of liver transplants in the country. Idaho Governor C. L. “Butch” Otter has proclaimed May to be National Hepatitis Awareness Month in Idaho. The proclamation helps shed light on the fact that over three million Americans have hepatitis C according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with a majority of those people unaware they are infected. It’s important for Idahoans to learn about the dangers of Hepatitis C and about the importance of testing for those at a higher risk for being infected.

In Idaho, preliminary surveillance data has indicated that over 1,230 residents were diagnosed with Hepatitis C in 2014. An Idaho Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics report indicated that 51 residents died from hepatitis C infection in 2013. Another 27 residents died from either liver failure or liver disease. If more residents had been made aware of their Hepatitis C status at an earlier date, potentially they could have received treatment sooner and lived healthier and longer lives.

Governor Otter’s proclamation helps to highlight the importance of testing for those who are at higher a risk for infection. Hepatitis C is transmitted through contact with the blood of an infected person, primarily through sharing contaminated needles or other equipment used to inject drugs. There is no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C. Nearly three in four people with Hepatitis C were born from 1945 through 1965, also known as the “Baby Boomer” age group. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends all Baby Boomers receive a one-time Hepatitis C test. In addition to Baby Boomers, the following groups of people should also be tested due to their increased risk:

- Current or past injection drug users (including legal drugs and vitamins),
- Those treated for a blood clotting problem before 1987,
- Those who received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992,
- Those on long-term hemodialysis treatment,
- Those with have abnormal liver tests or liver disease,
- Those exposed to blood through a needle stick or other sharp object injury, or
- Those infected with HIV.

Now is the time to become more informed on Hepatitis C and to get tested if your risk for Hepatitis C is high. With new advancements in treatment, many individuals diagnosed with Hepatitis C are now able to be cured. New oral medications are also much safer compared to older interferon-based treatment regimens. It is exciting that these medications are now available, but at the same time, these new medications can be difficult for many residents to afford. Those unable to cover the costs of the medications are encouraged to ask their healthcare provider about available Patient Assistance and Co-Pay Programs and other available resources for viral hepatitis medications.

*Source: The Idaho Viral Hepatitis Prevention Program*