

Hepatitis B Foundation Urges Expanded Screening, Vaccination and Education in Correctional Facilities

A new report calls for action to address hepatitis B among incarcerated people, who have disproportionately high infection rates.

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The Hepatitis B Foundation today released a new white paper, [Recommendations for Expanding Hepatitis B Screening and Prevention in Corrections](#), urging policymakers and public health leaders to implement stronger hepatitis B testing and prevention strategies in correctional facilities across the U.S.

An estimated 2.4 million people in the U.S. are living with chronic hepatitis B, a serious liver disease that can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer. Because hepatitis B is often asymptomatic, most individuals are unaware of their infection, which poses a risk of unknowingly transmitting the virus.

Prevalence among incarcerated individuals ranges from 0.9% to 11.4%, significantly higher than the national average of 0.3%. Moreover, up to 42.6% of incarcerated people may have had a past infection, according to national estimates.

“Correctional facilities represent one of the most impactful and practical points for intervention,” said Chari A. Cohen, DrPH, MPH, president of the Hepatitis B Foundation. “With the right funding and policy changes, we can reach people who are both at higher risk and medically underserved, making a real difference in public health outcomes.”

The white paper offers four primary recommendations:

1. Provide adequate and sustainable funding specifically designated to support hepatitis B screening and vaccination in correctional settings,
2. Support implementation of correctional health education programs that include hepatitis B awareness, prevention, and care navigation,
3. Implement opt-out testing and vaccination programs to maximize reach and improve early detection and prevention, and

4. Establish standardized federal and state correctional guidelines for managing hepatitis B and ensuring consistent care across facilities.

The Foundation also stresses the importance of linking individuals to appropriate care or vaccination as part of the testing process.

“Knowing one’s hepatitis B status can empower individuals to take steps to protect their health and reduce transmission,” said Beatrice Zovich, MPH, a public health program manager at the Foundation, and Michaela Jackson, MS, MPH, the nonprofit’s director of prevention policy, who co-led this critical research.

Targeted education and immunization programs have been shown to reduce infection risk, especially for populations at the intersection of high risk for HBV and incarceration, including racial and ethnic minority communities and people who use drugs.

The report aligns with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Viral Hepatitis National Strategic Plan, which identifies correctional facilities as priority sites for expanding testing and vaccination.

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