

Public Health Notes

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NH DHHS Mission Statement: To join communities and families in providing opportunities for citizens to achieve health and independence.

High Blood Pressure: A Ticking Timebomb

High blood pressure is often called the “silent killer” because it frequently has no warning signs or symptoms, and many people do not know they have it. Approximately 1 in 3 U.S. adults has high blood pressure (HBP). Only about half (52%) of these 70 million Americans have their HBP under control. That is why it is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Blood pressure is the force of blood against your artery walls as it circulates through your body. Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day, but it can cause health problems if it stays high for a long time. HBP can increase your chances of heart disease and stroke, two of the leading causes of death in the United States.

Anyone can develop HBP, even children. There are several factors that are beyond your control that can increase your risk for HBP, including your age, your sex, and your race and ethnicity. But there are steps you can take to reduce your risk of developing HBP, including eating a healthy diet with lots of fruits and vegetables, maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, limiting alcohol, and being physically active.

If you are diagnosed with HBP your doctor may prescribe medication to treat it. Making lifestyle changes can be just as important as taking medications. Speak with your healthcare provider about the best ways to reduce your risk.



Important Dates

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month

American Liver Foundation

www.liverfoundation.org

May is National High Blood Pressure Education Month

NHLBI Information Center

www.nhlbi.nih.gov

May is Better Sleep Month

The Better Sleep Council

www.bettersleep.org

May is National Mental Health Month

National Mental Health Association

www.nmha.org

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

National Stroke Association

www.stroke.org

May is National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month

Advocates for Youth

www.advocatesforyouth.org

May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/lyme

May 6-12 is National Nurses Week

American Nurses Association

www.nursingworld.org

May 10-16 is Women's Health Week

Office of Women's Health

U.S. Health and Human Services

www.cdc.gov/women

June is Fireworks Safety Month

National Council on Fireworks Safety

www.fireworksafety.com



New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services

Division of Public Health Services

29 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301

www.dhhs.nh.gov



June is National Safety Month

National Safety Council

www.nsc.org

June 15-21 is National Men's Health Week

National Men's Health Network

www.menshealthweek.org

June 27 is National HIV Testing Day

AIDS.gov

www.aids.gov

Hepatitis Awareness: Are You at Risk?



“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and help to fight infections. When the liver is damaged or inflamed it may not work properly.

Hepatitis can be caused by heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions. However, hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. There are five types of hepatitis—A through E. Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C are the most common types in the United States.

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by the Hepatitis C virus. Acute Hepatitis C refers to the first several months after someone is infected by the virus. Acute infection can range in severity from mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. For reasons that are not yet known, about 20% of people are able to clear, or get rid of, the virus without treatment in the first six months after infection. Unfortunately, most people who get infected are not able to clear the Hepatitis C virus and develop a chronic, or lifelong, infection. Over time, chronic Hepatitis C can cause serious health problems including liver disease, liver failure, and even liver cancer, and it is the leading cause of liver transplants.

Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body. Today, most people become infected with Hepatitis C by sharing needles, syringes, or any other equipment to inject drugs. Before widespread screening of the blood supply began in 1992, Hepatitis C was also spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants. While uncommon, poor infection control has occasionally resulted in outbreaks in healthcare settings. While rare, sexual transmission of Hepatitis C is possible. Hepatitis C can also be spread when getting tattoos and body piercings in unlicensed facilities, informal settings, or with non-sterile instruments. Also, approximately 6% of infants born to infected mothers will get Hepatitis C.

While anyone can get Hepatitis C, more than 75% of adults infected with the virus in the United States were born between 1945 and 1965—also known as baby boomers. Baby boomers are five times more likely to have Hepatitis C than others. Liver disease, liver cancer, and deaths from Hepatitis C are on the rise. The only way to know if you have Hepatitis C is to be tested. Doctors use a blood test, which looks for antibodies to the Hepatitis C virus. Antibodies are chemicals released into the bloodstream by the immune system when someone gets infected. Antibodies remain in the bloodstream even if someone clears the virus. A positive Hepatitis C antibody test means that a person has been infected with the Hepatitis C virus at some point in time. However, a positive antibody test does not necessarily mean a person still has Hepatitis C. An additional test is needed called an RNA test to see if a person is currently infected.

Certain groups of people are recommended to be tested, since they are more likely to have Hepatitis C, including people who:

- Were born from 1945–1965 (baby boomers)
- Received donated blood or organs before 1992
- Have ever injected drugs, even if it was just once many years ago
- Have certain medical conditions, such as chronic liver disease and HIV or AIDS
- Have abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- Have been exposed to blood from a person who has

Hepatitis C

- Are on hemodialysis
- Were born to a mother with Hepatitis C

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 Hepatitis C is primarily spread through contact with blood from an infected person, many baby boomers could have gotten infected from contaminated blood products before widespread screening of the blood supply in 1992 and universal precautions, which include specific recommendations for use of gloves, gowns, masks, and protective eyewear when contact with blood or body secretions containing blood is anticipated during patient treatment. Other boomers may have injected drugs, even if only once in the past. Still many baby boomers do not know how or when they became infected.

The good news is Hepatitis C can be treated. Treatment depends on many different factors, so it is important to see a doctor experienced in treating the disease. There are even new and improved treatments available that can cure Hepatitis C for many people.

Although there is currently no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C, there are ways to reduce the risk of becoming infected with the Hepatitis C virus:

- Avoid sharing or reusing needles, syringes, or any other equipment to prepare and inject drugs, steroids, hormones, or other substances.
- Do not use personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person's blood even in amounts too small to see, such as razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes, and glucose monitors.
- Do not get tattoos and body piercings from an unlicensed facility or in an informal setting.

For more information, speak with your health care provider or visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis or the NH DHHS Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/hepatitisc/index.htm>.

Measles

Most people have probably heard of measles, but most of us in the United States have not been directly affected by this rash illness because the vaccine was

first licensed in 1963. Measles is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. Measles causes fever, runny nose, cough, and a rash all over the body. About 1 in 10 children with measles also gets an ear infection, and up to 1 in 20 will contract pneumonia. For every 1,000 children who get measles 1 or 2 will die.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the decade before the measles vaccination program began, approximately 3–4 million people in the U.S. were infected with measles each year, of whom 400–500 died, 48,000 were hospitalized, and another 1,000 developed chronic disability from measles encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). In 2012, only 55 cases of measles were reported in the United States.

However, measles is still common in other countries. The virus is *highly* contagious and can spread rapidly in areas where vaccination is not widespread. It is estimated that in 2008 there were 164,000 measles deaths worldwide.

In this country, there is also concern because measles cases are on the rise. Each year, on average, 60 people in the U.S. are reported to have measles. But the number of cases reported in 2014 was 668 in 27 states. So far in 2015 there have been 166 cases from 19 states. A large outbreak that began in California at the end of December 2014 due to a traveler from Europe who was unvaccinated is responsible for 147 of these 166 cases. In New Hampshire, there has been only one case in the past 5 years, in 2011.

“Vaccination against measles is very important and very safe,” said Dr. Benjamin Chan, State Epidemiologist at the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. “Measles can be passed



A young boy with measles. Photo courtesy CDC.

from person to person by just being in the same room briefly with someone who is infected. Any disease is now just a plane ride and a day away, so we need to do all we can to protect our health and that of our loved ones. The measles vaccine is safe and effective, so contact your healthcare provider if you are unsure of your vaccination status.”

To learn more about measles visit the CDC at www.cdc.gov/measles. For questions or concerns about measles, contact the DHHS Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/index.htm.

Two New Reports Released

The New Hampshire Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Action Plan

Heart disease and stroke were identified as priorities in the *State Health Improvement Plan 2013–2020 (NH SHIP)*. In 2013, over 30% of New Hampshire residents reported that they had been told that they had high blood pressure and more than 2,300 New Hampshire residents died of coronary heart disease, heart attack, or stroke. The *Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Plan* was developed to build upon the SHIP. The Plan provides a framework for action over the next several years for partners to work together to reduce the burden of heart disease and stroke by improving systems of care and the overall cardiovascular health of residents in communities across New Hampshire. To visit the DHHS Heart Disease & Stroke Prevention Program visit www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdpc/hdsp.htm.

Tickborne Disease Prevention Plan

DHHS released a *Tickborne Disease Prevention Plan* that provides detailed information about the tickborne diseases encountered in New Hampshire and methods to prevent them. The intent of this plan is to describe preventive measures and actions that are recommended for individuals in the State to prevent tickborne disease.

“Lyme disease is a major public health issue in New Hampshire and this plan provides a collaborative and comprehensive approach to staying safe from the type of tick that carries Lyme disease,” said Dr. Benjamin Chan, State Epidemiologist. “Blacklegged ticks carry

the bacterium that causes Lyme disease. These ticks even cause other infections besides Lyme disease. This new plan highlights the many ways that we can prevent tick bites.”



In 2014, there were an estimated 1,415 cases of Lyme disease in New Hampshire. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were over 36,000 cases in the United States in 2013 (the most recent year for which data are available), and New Hampshire had the second highest incidence rate of Lyme disease in the country.

For more information about Lyme disease and other tickborne diseases, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/ticks/index.html.

DHHS Goes Tobacco Free!

On Monday June 1, 2015, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services will become a tobacco-free workplace. This new policy will apply to our clients, our visitors, our employees, and their families when on DHHS properties. This is an important step for the health of everyone who works in, visits, or resides in any of our buildings. All forms of tobacco use, including electronic cigarettes, will no longer be permitted. As the State’s health department, it is important for DHHS to lead by example.

