



# NEWS



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## **May is National Hepatitis Awareness Month** *May 19 is National Hepatitis Testing Day*

BLOOMINGTON, IL- Millions of Americans are living with chronic Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C infections, yet most don't know they have these potentially deadly liver diseases. People can live for decades without symptoms, but over time, chronic Hepatitis can cause serious health problems. The McLean County Health Department is joining with the Centers for Disease Control and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), to shed light on this hidden epidemic by raising awareness of viral Hepatitis and encouraging priority populations to get tested as part of National Hepatitis Awareness Month.

Beginning in May, the health department has a limited-time opportunity to provide Hepatitis C testing free of charge to McLean county residents born between the years 1945 through 1965. Individuals born within these years are 5 times more likely to have Hepatitis C than any other adult population: accounting for 3 out of every 4 people with Hepatitis C. Current estimates suggest that an estimated 3.2 million people have chronic Hepatitis C, with about 22,000 new infections occurring each year.

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The Hepatitis C blood test is a simple finger stick and results are provided within 30 minutes. The test screens for the Hepatitis C antibody. Anyone testing positive can be referred to an IDPH resource and will be encouraged to see their healthcare provider for the appropriate follow-up. The sooner you know if you're infected with Hepatitis C, the more you can do to protect your liver. Early detection saves lives.

Appointments can be made by calling the health department at 309-888-5435. Free Hepatitis C testing will be available until the end of August, or when the supply of testing kits is gone. The free testing kits are being provided by the IDPH.

During National Hepatitis Awareness Month, the health department also reminds individuals that Hepatitis B vaccinations are available at the immunization clinic. Hepatitis B is a leading cause of liver cancer, especially among Asian-Americans. An estimated 1 in 12 Asian-Americans has chronic Hepatitis B. Appointments for the Hepatitis B vaccination can be made by calling 309-888-5435.

Millions of Americans are affected by viral hepatitis. Both Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can progress to a lifelong infection that can cause serious health problems including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. Most people with chronic hepatitis do not know they are infected and can live with the disease for decades without feeling sick. Many with Hepatitis C have no known reported risk factors, other than the time period in which they were born.

To learn more about your risk of having chronic hepatitis, take the CDC's Online Hepatitis Risk Assessment, <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/RiskAssessment/>. To schedule an appointment for the free Hepatitis C test, or to get a Hepatitis B vaccination, contact the McLean County Health Department at 309-888-5435.

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