TuSalud

Hepatitis C and Me

What Latinos need to know about this "silent killer"—before it's too late.

March 24, 2014 By Casey Halter

The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is the most COMMON blood-borne infection in the United States, but it's known as America's "silent killer" because most people living with the virus don't know they're infected.

Hep C, which slowly attacks the liver, is transmitted through contact with infected blood, usually through needles (during drug use or tattooing), contaminated blood transfusions or childbirth. In rare cases, HCV can also be transmitted sexually.

Nearly 80 percent of patients diagnosed with it don't show any obvious symptoms, and about 20 percent of people with hep C clear it on their own. But over the course of several years, it can lead to cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver cancer, liver failure and death.

More than 18,000 new hepatitis C infections occur every year in the United States. And nearly 12,000 people die from HCV-related liver disease annually.

There is no vaccine to protect against the virus, but it can be cured using a combination of approved medications.

Fast Facts: Hepatitis and Latinos

- Roughly 4 million Americans are living with chronic hepatitis C. Latinos account for nearly a quarter, or 1 million of these infections.
- Latinos are less likely than non-Hispanic whites to get tested for HCV.
- Latinos have some of the highest risks of contracting, being diagnosed with, or dying from hepatitis C in the United States.
- Hepatitis C progresses more quickly and results in more health problems in Latinos than among other ethnic groups.

For more information and support for people living with and at risk for hepatitis C, visit hepmag.com.

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