Testing for Hepatitis C Virus Remains Low among Baby Boomers

Two years after recommendations, only a small percentage have been tested

A new Brief Report appearing in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine looks at testing rates for Hepatitis C virus (HCV) two years after the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommended it for all baby boomers, and finds rates are still very

Approximately 3.5 million people in the United States have chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. Most of those (80%) are “baby boomers” (born between 1945 and 1965), and most of them are unaware of their infections despite availability of treatments that may reduce their risk of HCV-related diseases, including chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis, and liver cancer.

In 2013, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommended one-time HCV testing for baby boomers. An earlier report noted low HCV testing prevalence among baby boomers, but it has been is unknown whether HCV testing has changed following the USPSTF recommendation.

To find out more, researchers Ahmedin Jemal, DVM, PhD, and Stacey Fedewa, PhD, studied responses from nearly 24,000 baby boomers included in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). They found from 2013 to 2015, HCV testing prevalence among baby boomers increased only slightly, from 12.3% to 13.8%. Of the 76.2 million estimated baby boomers in 2015, only 10.5 million reported ever receiving HCV testing.

The investogators found peope with Medicare plus Medicaid, Medicaid only, or military insurance had higher rates of HCV testing than the privately insured. HCV testing was also greater in men versus women, and among college graduates

“Prevalence of HCV testing among baby boomers did not substantially increase and remains low two years after the USPSTF recommendation in 2013,” write the authors. “These findings underscore the need for increased awareness for HCV testing among healthcare providers and baby boomers and other innovative strategies such as state-mandated HCV testing.”

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