Hep C Risk Highest for Baby Boomers, but Most Haven’t Been Tested

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Almost three-quarters of those most likely to be living with chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection—baby boomers, notably those born between 1945 and 1965—have never been tested or are unsure if they have been tested for hepatitis C, according to a new survey conducted by the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA).

The survey, released in advance of National Hepatitis Testing Day, also found that 80 percent of polled baby boomers do not consider themselves at any risk for having the disease, despite the fact that 82 percent of the roughly 5 million U.S. residents with the disease are between 47 and 67 years old and 75 percent don’t know they have it.

In addition to a lack of knowledge, the survey showed a lack of action: 83 percent of the baby boomers surveyed have never discussed hepatitis C with their health care provider, even though it is diagnosed with a simple blood test and for many people it can be cured.

Because many boomers have been infected for decades, AGA notes, the number of people who die from hepatitis C–related liver problems is expected to increase by 207 percent from 2000 to 2030.

The survey of more than 1,000 baby boomers not previously diagnosed with hepatitis C was conducted online as part of a new Vertex Pharmaceuticals-funded educational campaign called “ID Hep C.”

The survey also indicates that 83 percent of baby boomers don’t realize their generation is most likely to have hepatitis C. Instead, half (52 percent) believe all age groups have a similar risk, and nearly one quarter (24 percent) think those in Generation X—people between 31 and 46 years old—are more likely to have the disease.

Fifty-five percent of those surveyed also think every ethnic group has the same likelihood of having hepatitis C, even though African Americans and Latinos are affected by hepatitis C at a significantly higher rate than the general population.
Fewer than one in five of those surveyed knew that for many people, hepatitis C can be cured.

“Many baby boomers have a potentially dangerous ‘it’s not me’ mentality about hepatitis C, and this survey underscores how poorly most people in that generation understand that risk factors do

apply to them," said Ira M. Jacobson, MD, of Weill Medical College of Cornell University and an advisory to AGA's campaign in a news announcement. "Given the potentially deadly consequences of allowing hepatitis C to go undiagnosed, the AGA urges all baby boomers to talk to their doctors about getting tested."

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