

# Substance Abuse Trends **Alert!**

April 2020

## Parallel Hepatitis C & Opioid Epidemics: A Change in Recommendations

### Infectious Diseases Associated with Drug Use Continue to Rise in the US

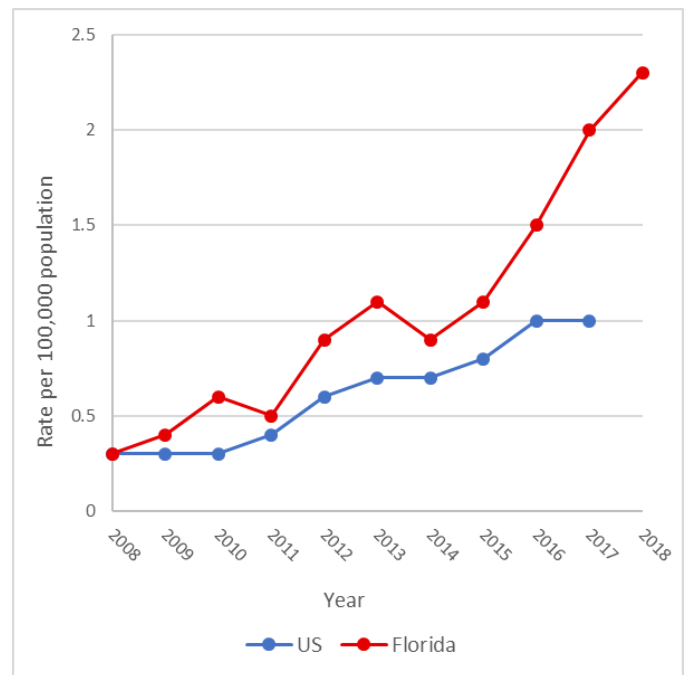
A number of infectious diseases are experiencing sustained increases in recent years across the US, including sexually transmitted diseases and hepatitis C, and increased drug use has been implicated as one of the factors contributing to the rise.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Indeed, the opioid use and infectious disease epidemics have been described as intertwined; the latter of which resulting, at least in part, due to the traditional model of treatment for substance use disorder, which is often delivered independent of other medical care.<sup>4</sup>

### Hepatitis C Epidemic in the US

Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne infection in the US, but over half of acutely infected individuals show no signs or symptoms of disease, increasing the likelihood of continued spread of the virus (HCV).<sup>2,5,6</sup> In addition, because hepatitis C is treatable, much of the morbidity and mortality associated with HCV infection is preventable.<sup>7,8</sup> Associated with injection drug use, rates of hepatitis C have been steadily increasing across the US in recent years (Figure 1). And, while once concentrated among older adults, in 2018, newly acquired infections occurred most frequently among 20-29 year olds, and newly reported cases of chronic hepatitis C occurred most frequently among 30 – 39 year-olds.<sup>6</sup>

### Hepatitis C Continues to Increase in Florida

With rates steadily increasing over time, the rate of acute hepatitis C infection in Florida has been higher than that for the US as a whole since 2009 (Figure 1); Florida ranked ninth (of 44 reporting states) for acute hepatitis C infection in the nation in 2017, and the risk factors reported most often within six months of infection were injection drug use (18%) and non-injection drug use (17%).<sup>2,9</sup> Like the trend seen nationally, younger adults (25-34 years, and 20-24 years, respectively) are experiencing the highest rates of acute infection.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 1.** Rate of reported cases of acute hepatitis C, US and Florida, 2008 – 2018. Source: CDC ([2017](#) and [2012](#) Surveillance) and [FLHealthCharts](#).

### Recommendations

Previously, only persons born 1945-1965 and those with known risk factors such as injection drug use and HIV infection, were recommended for hepatitis C testing.<sup>10</sup> However, earlier this month, the CDC revised its recommendations, adding HCV screening 1) at least once in a lifetime for all adults  $\geq 18$  years, and 2) for all pregnant women during *each* pregnancy (both unless local prevalence is less than 0.1%).<sup>11,12</sup> Existing recommendations, including at least one-time testing for persons who have ever injected drugs and periodic testing for persons who continue to inject drugs remain in effect.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Due to stigma associated with risk factors for hepatitis C infection, persons requesting testing should receive it, regardless of disclosed risk factors.

For more information, please visit the following:

## Additional Information Sources

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hepatitis C General Information \(April 2020\)](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hepatitis C: A Silent Epidemic Infographic](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Viral Hepatitis, Hepatitis C](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Viral Hepatitis Surveillance Reports](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Prevention Information Network, Hepatitis C Support Project HCV Advocate](#)

[Florida Department of Health, Data Summaries for Common Reportable Diseases/Conditions, Hepatitis C \(pages 44-47\)](#)

[Florida Hepatitis Prevention Program](#)

[Florida Hepatitis Resource Guide](#)

[HCV Guidance: Recommendations for Testing, Managing, and Treating Hepatitis C](#)

[Understanding Hepatitis C in Florida](#)

HELP-4-HEP. National hepatitis C support line staffed by peer counselors. Health education, resources, referrals for testing and treatment, and emotional support. Mon–Fri, 9 am–7pm ET. 877-435-7443 toll-free.

## References

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9. Florida Department of Health. (2017). Florida Morbidity Statistics Report. Accessed at: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/disease-reporting-and-management/disease-reporting-and-surveillance/data-and-publications/documents/2017-annual-morbidity-statistics-report.pdf>.
10. Smith, B. D., Morgan, R. L., Beckett, G. A., Falck-Ytter, Y., Holtzman, D., Teo, C. G., ... & Alter, M. (2012). Recommendations for the identification of chronic hepatitis C virus infection among persons born during 1945–1965. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Recommendations and Reports*, 61(4), 1-32.
11. Schillie, S., Wester, C., Osborne, M., Wesolowski, L., & Ryerson, A. B. (2020). CDC recommendations for hepatitis C screening among adults—United States, 2020. *MMWR Recommendations and Reports*, 69(2), 1.
12. Havens, P. L., & Anderson, J. R. (2020). Updated CDC Recommendations for Universal Hepatitis C Virus Screening Among Adults and Pregnant Women: Implications for Clinical Practice. *JAMA*.