

New Recommendations for Hepatitis C Screenings

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The United States Preventive Services Task Force released new recommendations for Hepatitis C screenings in hopes of catching the disease earlier and implementing effective treatment.

The USPSTF tells doctors what diseases they should screen for during annual physicals. They recommend that Hepatitis C tests be added to common blood draws like cholesterol and diabetes.

They say people born between 1945 and 1965 could be at higher risk.

Hepatitis C is one of the most common causes of in-stage liver disease, and the most common reason people get liver transplants.

The top two risk factors for getting Hepatitis C are intravenous (IV) drug abuse and numerous blood transfusions -- especially before 1992, at which point blood transfusions became a more thorough process, says Dr. Greiner.

Dr. Greiner says 60 percent of people with new Hepatitis C infections report using IV drugs within the last six months, and she adds that people typically "under-report."

"The whole hope with this screening test is that you catch Hepatitis C before it's progressed to the point of causing liver damage, so if you can treat something in the early stages, the outcome is going to be a lot better than if the disease has progressed and you have bad liver disease," said Katy Greiner, M.D., a family physician at Baylor Scott & White in College Station.

Doctors at Baylor Scott & White in College Station say anti-viral treatments for certain types of Hepatitis C are becoming more widely used.

"If there was nothing we could do, then there's no reason to screen, but, if you can catch something early, and treat it, you can end up not going into liver failure and still live a completely normal life and completely get rid of your Hepatitis C," said Dr. Greiner.