



Hepatitis C and People Who Inject Drugs (PWID)

What is hepatitis C (HCV)? Hepatitis C is a disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). It primarily affects the liver and over time may damage the liver and the overall health of an individual. The liver is a “non-complaining” organ, so three out of four persons infected with hepatitis C may experience only very mild or no symptoms at all until many years after initial infection. However, they can still spread the disease even if no symptoms are present. If left untreated, hepatitis C may lead to chronic liver disease such as cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer.

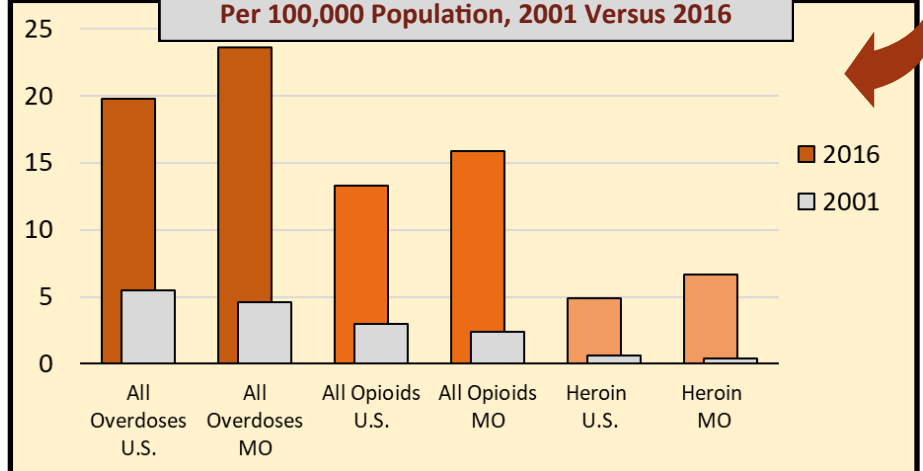
Why such high rates of HCV in PWID? People who inject drugs can acquire and spread hepatitis C through equipment that may be contaminated with blood, such as needles, syringes, water, foil, and cotton. Approximately 32% of persons who engage in injection drug use (IDU) become positive for hepatitis C within one year and that figure increases to 53% within five years. Engaging in behaviors associated with IDU has become the primary risk factor for contracting hepatitis C.

Opioids in Missouri Opioid abuse in particular is a growing problem in Missouri. There were 3,413 opioid overdose emergency room (ER) visits by Missouri residents in 2016. The total initial cost of opioid-involved ER visits (before insurance negotiations, write-offs, etc.) was \$109,035,767 for the 2012 to 2016 time period. Inpatient hospitalization visits associated with opioid abuse more than doubled from 2001 to 2014, going from 5,332 visits to 10,938 visits. From 2014 to 2016 the visits decreased to 8,747. It should be noted that the ICD-9 CM coding standard transitioned to ICD-10 CM in the fourth quarter of 2015, so caution should be used with comparison of counts for years prior to the transition with years after the transition. Opioid-specific age-adjusted death rates are higher in Missouri, at 15.9 per 100,000 residents, compared to the national overall rate of 13.3. Between 2001 and 2016, the opioid death rate in Missouri increased by nearly seven times, from 2.4 to 15.9. From 2001 to 2016, the Missouri heroin death rate grew from 0.4 to 6.7, an almost 17-fold increase, and was almost 37% higher than the U.S. rate.

What are the risk factors for HCV?

▶▶ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that the primary risk factor for hepatitis infection for those under the age of 30 years is related to IDU behaviors. However, there are many other risk factors, such as getting tattoos or piercings in unsafe settings, long-term hemodialysis, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection, and being born to a hepatitis C-infected mother.

U.S. and Missouri Resident Overdose Death Rates, Per 100,000 Population, 2001 Versus 2016



Chronic Hepatitis C Under 30 Years Old Missouri, 2017

Age	Count
0-4	23
5-9	0
10-14	0
15-19	39
20-24	265
25-29	500
Total	827

Why test for HCV? Hepatitis C, if left untreated, is associated with late-stage complications such as liver cirrhosis and hepatocellular cancer. Therefore, screening is important to prevent the spread of hepatitis C and promote clinical interventions before the occurrence of late stages of disease, which are difficult and costly to treat and decrease life expectancy.

Who is infected with HCV? Of the 4,897 chronic hepatitis C cases reported in Missouri in 2017, 827 were diagnosed in persons under the age of 30 years. This age group made up 16.9% of all persons diagnosed with chronic hepatitis C in 2017.

An EO/AA employer: Services provided on a nondiscriminatory basis. Hearing- and speech-impaired citizens can dial 711.

2016 Missouri ER Figures: Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Health Care Analysis and Data Dissemination. Patient Abstract System dataset. Received 12-06-2018.

2016 U.S. Overdose Death Rates: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2017 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released December 2018. Available at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10.html>. Accessed 12-05-2018.

2017 Missouri Hepatitis C Figures: Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Reportable Disease Informatics. Missouri Health Surveillance Information System (WebSurv). Annual dataset frozen 06-28-2018. All other sources referenced in this fact sheet are fully cited in the *Epidemiologic Profile of Viral Hepatitis in Missouri-2015*, which is available at <http://health.mo.gov/data/hivstdaids/data.php>.
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