

Rates of Hepatitis C Virus Testing Among United States Veterans in Department of Veterans Affairs Care, 2011

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BACKGROUND

- In August 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) augmented its recommendations for hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing. ¹ CDC recommended: *"one-time testing without prior ascertainment of HCV risk for persons born during 1945-1965, a population with a disproportionately high prevalence of HCV infection and related disease."*
- Historically, the policy for HCV testing in the Department of Veterans Affairs was based on assessing for exposure risk consistent with previous CDC recommendations.
- We sought to assess the extent to which Veterans in recent VA care—particularly those Veterans born between 1945 and 1965—have been tested for HCV.

METHODS

- Data Source:**
- VA Corporate Data Warehouse (CDW) which includes birth dates, sex, race, ethnicity and VA laboratory tests for Veterans who have received VA care
 - VA laboratory data in CDW from 1 October 1999 through 31 December 2011
- Cohort**
- Veterans with at least one VA outpatient visit in 2011
- Study design**
- Retrospective cohort
 - For each Veteran with an outpatient visit in 2011, we determined if the Veteran ever had VA HCV testing by 31 December 2011
 - HCV antibody (including recombinant immunoblot assay (RIBA)), viral load and genotype tests recorded at any VA facility nationally qualified as HCV testing
 - HCV testing rates calculated for each of 130 reporting facilities that encompass all VA health care providers

RESULTS

■ 5,415,084 Veterans with VA outpatient visit in 2011 ■ 2,971,104 (54.9%) with HCV testing

Table 1. Demographics of cohort

		n (%)
Sex	Male	5,076,760 (93.8%)
	Female	338,294 (6.2%)
Race/ethnicity	American Indian/Alaskan Native	36,631 (0.7%)
	Asian	42,045 (0.8%)
	Black	794,431 (14.7%)
	Hispanic	302,782 (5.6%)
	White	3,542,352 (65.4%)
	Other/mixed/unknown	660,767 (12.2%)
Birth cohort	Born before 1945	2,168,386 (40.0%)
	Born 1945-1965	2,439,792 (45.1%)
	Born after 1965	806,231 (14.9%)

Figure 2. HCV testing by race/ethnicity (all birth cohorts)

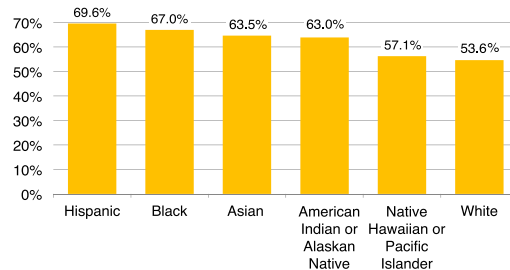


Figure 4. HCV testing by birth cohort by region

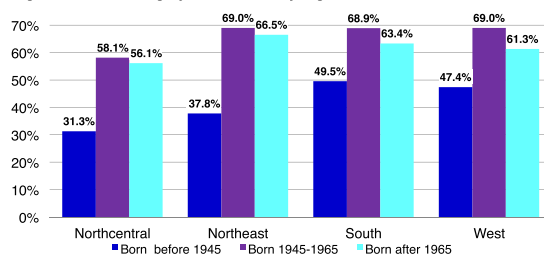


Figure 1. HCV testing by sex (all birth cohorts)

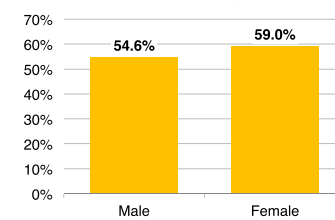


Figure 3. HCV testing by birth cohort

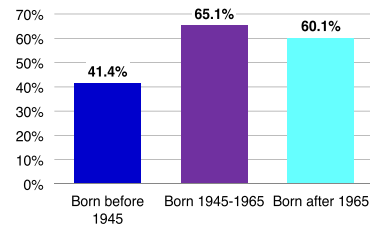
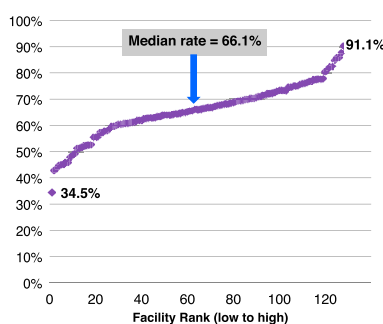


Figure 5. HCV testing by facility for Veterans born 1945-1965



CONCLUSIONS

- VA HCV testing rates were highest among those born between 1945 and 1965 prior to the new CDC birth cohort recommendations
 - Nevertheless, a substantial number of Veterans in this birth cohort still require HCV testing to meet the new CDC recommendations
 - Wide variation exists in HCV testing rates within this birth cohort across VA facilities;
 - extremely high performance (>90%) has been achieved at some facilities which suggests that such high performance can be achieved across the system
 - extremely low performance at some facilities suggests the need for facility specific assessments
 - Full adoption of birth cohort testing is likely to reveal substantial numbers of Veterans with previously unknown HCV infections which will have far reaching implications for the VA healthcare system
- Strengths:**
- Robust observation of HCV testing rates in a large cohort of patients seen in routine medical practice.
- Limitations:**
- HCV testing rate underestimated since HCV tests performed outside VA are not included in CDW and since VA tests prior to 1999 are not included in CDW.

REFERENCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Recommendations for the identification of chronic hepatitis C virus infection among persons born during 1945-1965. *MMWR* 2012;61(RR-4):1-32