Emergency Help

ERs may help slow the rising rates of undiagnosed hepatitis C.

December 3, 2015 By Kate Ferguson

Many public health officials expect hepatitis C virus (HCV) rates will spike because of a rise in the number of people injecting heroin. The assumption makes sense because intravenous drug use is one of the primary ways hep C is transmitted. What's more, this rate will also be bumped up by baby boomers (those born between 1945 and 1965) who test positive for HCV.

It's not completely understood why baby boomers have high rates of hep C. But most boomers are believed to have become infected in the 1970s and 1980s when rates of hepatitis C were highest. There was also no test for hep C, so people could get it from surgeries and blood transfusions.

But the good news is, findings show urban ERs can help health officials identify people who aren't yet diagnosed with hep C. Doctors say this can help slow the spread of this potentially deadly blood-borne disease.

Says Douglas White, MD, a doctor in the ER at Highland Hospital in Oakland, California, and the study's lead author, many of the 3 million people who are infected tend to be heavy emergency room users already, so this will be a chance to connect them to "ongoing care at HCV clinics or elsewhere in the health care system."

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/hepatitis-c-emergency-rooms-28130-3214