

# West Virginia Faces Epidemics of Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C

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West Virginia is facing drastically increasing rates of both hepatitis C virus (HCV) and hepatitis B virus (HBV), an epidemic of viral liver diseases that is largely fueled by a growing number of prescription opioid drug and heroin users across the state, the West Virginia Gazette [reports](#).

The latest statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as the West Virginia Department of Health, show that the Appalachian state has the highest rates of HBV and HCV cases in the United States.

In 2012, West Virginia's hep C rate was reported at 3.1 cases per 100,000 people, compared with 0.7 cases per 100,000 nationally. Those rates have been increasing steadily ever since.

Hep B cases in West Virginia are also on the rise, with rates tripling across the state's Ohio Valley region between 2013 and 2014. In 2013, hep B rates were reported at 10.6 per 100,000 people in West Virginia, compared with the national rate of 0.9 cases per 100,000 people.

Reports show about two-thirds of people with hepatitis in West Virginia identify themselves as drug users. The rate of prescription drug deaths in West Virginia is the highest in the country, with overdose rates increasing six-fold between 1999 and 2010. Heroin-related deaths have also doubled in the state since 2010.

In response, state public health officials have been pushing for widespread hep B vaccination campaigns across West Virginia, as well as the opening of more syringe exchanges, which are proven to help reduce rates among injection drug users. There is no vaccination for Hep C.

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