



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
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HUMAN SERVICES**

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From: Richard Moore II, MD, AAHIVS, Hepatitis Medical Director

To: OBGYN & Pediatric Providers

Subject: Perinatal Hepatitis C Testing Update

Date: November 20, 2023

### Summary

On November 3, 2023 the CDC released [updated guidance](#) for testing of all infants perinatally exposed to hepatitis C. The guidelines recommend transitioning from Hepatitis C Antibody testing at 18 months to testing using Hepatitis C RNA testing as early as two months for screening in infancy.

### Background

Between 2.7 and 3.9 million individuals are hepatitis C infected within the US. Up to 75% of people in the US are unaware that they are infected. Because of increasing numbers of individuals with hepatitis C outside of the baby boomer population (born 1945-1965), routine screening guidance from the CDC was expanded in 2020 to include testing of all adults at least once. Screening recommendations were also updated to include hepatitis C screening during each pregnancy because of increased incidence of acute and chronic hepatitis C in women of childbearing age.

Hepatitis C treatment is highly effective, with cure rates above 95%, and likelihood of side effects and drug-drug interactions are low. Treatment is available for individuals as young as three years of age. In spite of these advances, the majority of people with hepatitis C remain untreated.

Hepatitis C infections occur in 6-7% of perinatally-exposed infants. Updated testing recommendations are intended to enhance screening rates and allow for earlier detection and linkage to care.

### Updated Testing Recommendations

Prior guidance for testing infants born to mothers with hepatitis C focused on waiting until 18 months to perform follow-up testing on infants to allow for clearance of maternal antibodies and using Hepatitis C Antibody testing with reflex testing to Hepatitis C RNA as the test of choice.

The updated CDC guidance recommends use of Hepatitis C RNA testing, instead of delayed antibody testing, as early as two months to allow for earlier diagnosis and improved testing frequency.

The graphic below shows the steps that should be taken based on infant age for hepatitis C screening.

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## HCV RNA

- CDC 11/2023 Guidance: Perform HCV RNA testing between 2 and 6 months
- Repeat not necessary if negative
- If testing not done by 6 months, test with HCV RNA between 7 and 17 months
- Link to provider with training in pediatric HCV treatment if positive

## HCV Antibody

- If 18 months or older: HCV Antibody testing with reflex to HCV RNA
- HCV Ab positive and HCV RNA positive = infection, linkage to care needed
- HCV Ab negative = not infected, no additional testing needed
- HCV Ab positive and HCV RNA negative = not infected
  - No additional testing needed, likely immune clearance