



Philadelphia Department of Public Health  
**Division of Disease Control**

JAMES W. BUEHLER, MD  
Health Commissioner

NAN FEYLER, JD, MPH  
Deputy Commissioner for Public Health Programs

CAROLINE C. JOHNSON, MD  
Director, Division of Disease Control

***Health Advisory***  
**Activities to Improve Testing for Perinatal Hepatitis C**  
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The American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD) recommends (<https://bit.ly/AASLDGuidelines>) that infants born to women who test positive for hepatitis C virus (HCV) be screened with:

- An anti-HCV antibody test with reflex to HCV RNA at  $\geq 18$  months of age\*

*\*Positive HCV antibody results obtained from a child < 18 months of age could be the result of maternal infection, and should be repeated after 18 months.*

Children who are perinatally-infected with HCV are at high risk of chronic infection, and subsequent development of serious sequelae including cirrhosis and liver failure. However, anti-viral treatment is now approved for children aged 3 years and older, and may be curative.

A recent analysis conducted by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health's Hepatitis Epidemiology Program found that most infants born to women who test positive for hepatitis C virus are not being appropriately screened. Of the approximately 500 children born to HCV-positive mothers during 2011-2013, only 5% were adequately tested for HCV. If 5-10% of infants born to HCV-infected mothers are perinatally-infected (published estimate), at least 22 of these 500 children are unknowingly at risk of developing chronic liver disease from HCV. Failure to test at-risk children for HCV is likely because pediatric-care providers are unaware of the mother's infection status, and the mother is unaware of HCV transmission risk to the child.

**To address this problem, the Health Department is launching a program to promote perinatal HCV testing in Philadelphia, by:**

- 1) Notifying HCV-infected mothers with children aged 18-24 months to urge them to request HCV testing at their child's 2-year well visit.
- 2) Offering in-service trainings on perinatal HCV transmission, local epidemiology, and screening guidelines at Philadelphia obstetric and pediatric practices, and birth hospitals.
- 3) Providing resources for pediatric and obstetric providers about HCV including lists of local pediatric specialists, educational posters, and screening for under-insured children.

To aid this effort, **please report all positive and negative HCV test results for children born to HCV-positive mothers to the Health Department by secure FAX to 215-238-6947.** If you have any questions about perinatal HCV transmission or need additional information, please contact the Hepatitis Epidemiology Program (215-685-6493 or [HEP-DDC@phila.gov](mailto:HEP-DDC@phila.gov)).

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Philadelphia Department of Public Health

Division of Disease Control • 500 South Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19146  
215-685-6740 (phone) • 215-686-4514 (after hours) • 215-238-6947 (fax) • [www.phila.gov/health/DiseaseControl](http://www.phila.gov/health/DiseaseControl) • [hip.phila.gov/xv](http://hip.phila.gov/xv)