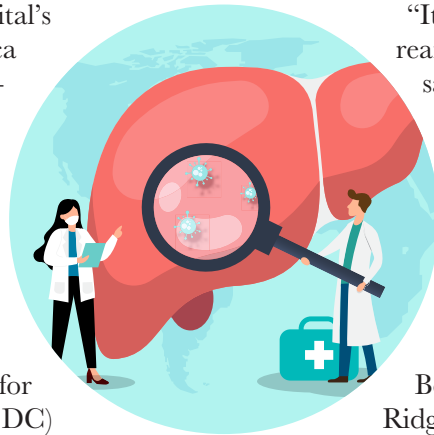


# Hepatitis C: *It's Time for a Cure*

As Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital's infectious disease specialist, Rebecca Dillingham, MD, MPH, is passionate about caring for people with hepatitis C. She has published more than 100 peer-reviewed manuscripts and received numerous teaching, mentoring, clinical service and innovation awards.

Her message to our community is simple: If you're over 18, follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and get tested for hepatitis C. More than 2.5 million Americans have the disease, which is currently on the rise among younger people. Although the condition typically causes no symptoms initially, over time it can take a heavy toll on the liver and the body as a whole.

While a hepatitis C diagnosis was once devastating, today the disease is curable. Supported by Sentara, the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Department of Corrections, Dr. Dillingham and her dedicated nursing team are on the front lines of eradicating hepatitis C statewide. By treating patients, training clinicians and pioneering new methods of care delivery, they have helped more than 5,000 patients access treatment.



“It’s possible to put hep C in the rear view in the next 10 years,” says Dr. Dillingham. “If you or a loved one is living with hepatitis C, don’t be afraid to seek treatment. Medications are available — without judgment — to whomever needs them.”

## Who should be screened?

Both the CDC and the Blue Ridge Health Department recommend that everyone over 18 be tested. Testing is especially important for young people and women who are pregnant. And since hepatitis C generally causes no symptoms, testing is necessary for a diagnosis.

## How is hepatitis C spread?

The most common blood-borne disease in the United States, hepatitis C is spread through contact with the blood of an infected person, which can occur when sharing nonsterile drug-injection equipment, snorting drugs, receiving tattoos and piercings from nonsterile needles, and even sharing razors or other household items that may have tiny amounts of blood on them.

## Why get treated?

Even if you don’t feel sick, the hepatitis C virus can still damage the liver. It can also result in severe fatigue, worsen diabetes, cause kidney issues and even precipitate some types of cancer. Treatment, which takes just eight to 12 weeks and has a 95% cure rate, is available at little to no cost and has few, if any, side effects.

➔ Contact your primary care physician to make an appointment to get tested. To learn more, visit [Virginiahepc.com](http://Virginiahepc.com) or listen to the recording of Dr. Dillingham’s First Tuesday Educational Session on hepatitis C at [mjhfoundation.org/hepatitis](http://mjhfoundation.org/hepatitis).



The VirginiaHepC team: (Left to right) Patrice Ross, RN; Lisa Holtzworth, RN; Terry Kemp-Knick, BSN-BC, MPH; Rebecca Dillingham, MD, MPH, Medical Director, VirginiaHepC