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Denver Health research shows that testing for hepatitis C in emergency departments can significantly identify infections, allowing earlier treatment and reducing public health risk

DENVER (July 9, 2025) — Findings from a national study led by Denver Health researchers could prove to be a game changer in the detection and treatment of hepatitis C, a common type of viral hepatitis found in the United States. Researchers found that testing for hepatitis C in emergency departments, even when risk factors were unknown, contributed greatly to detecting the disease. The study entitled, “Hepatitis C Screening in Emergency Departments: The DETECT Hep C Randomized Clinical Trial” was published today in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). Funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), this study represents a significant advancement in the field of hepatitis C (HCV) screening and public health.

Led by two Denver Health physicians, Jason Haukoos, MD, MSc Emergency Medicine and Sarah Rowan, MD, Infectious Diseases, the study involved a national team of investigators from Denver Health, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Mississippi Medical Center, Boston Medical Center, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, Alameda Health System and Highland Hospital. This clinical trial included nearly 150,000 emergency department (ED) patients randomized to evaluate the effectiveness of routine non-risk-based HCV screening compared to a risk-based targeted approach to screening.

“The study identified routine non-risk-based HCV screening as superior to a risk-based targeted approach,” said Dr. Haukoos. “This allows for earlier detection and treatment of the virus with the ultimate goal of avoiding chronic or long-term infection and its health consequences. It also demonstrates the important role emergency departments play as critical health care access points.”

“Over 3 million people in the U.S. have hepatitis C, including more than 30,000 people in Colorado alone. Even though it can be cured in 8 to 12 weeks with easy and effective treatment, many people don't know they have it to treat it,” said Dr. Rowan. “Since many

people don't have regular access to primary care, emergency departments are often important safety nets for detecting chronic conditions and infections of public health significance. We showed that screening for Hep C in emergency departments can have a huge impact on both population and individual health.”

The research team believes this trial represents the largest and most comprehensive evaluation of HCV screening strategies in EDs to date and underscores the importance of understanding real-world comparative effectiveness of nontargeted to targeted opt-out HCV screening when integrated into emergency care. This is particularly important given national viral hepatitis elimination goals, which provide a framework to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat in the US. This trial was performed in three high-volume, geographically diverse, urban EDs, including Denver Health, in the United States and included full integration of HCV screening into ED processes of care, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, while using existing clinical staff. A non-risk-based screening approach was superior to a risk-based screening approach for identifying patients with HCV infection, supporting current recommendations by the Centers for Disease and Prevention, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases for performing non-risk-based HCV screening.

This study represents the type of practice-changing research conducted and led by Denver Health, showcasing the health system’s commitment to advancing public health and improving patient care.

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About Denver Health

Denver Health is a comprehensive health and hospital system that provides high-quality care and proudly serves as the city’s safety-net hospital. For more than 160 years, Denver Health has been guided by its mission to serve the people of Denver, to educate the next generation of health care professionals and to engage in research and community partnerships to better deliver the health care needs of our patients while strengthening our community.