

## What is hepatitis C?

The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a virus that harms the liver slowly over time. It can easily be spread between people through blood-to-blood contact. While some people who are infected with HCV are able to clear the virus on their own without treatment, about 8 out of 10 people develop chronic HCV infection, and 2/3 of people with chronic infection eventually develop liver disease unless they are tested and treated. Living with HCV without treatment can result in cirrhosis (severe liver scarring), with some cases progressing to liver cancer. Luckily, today HCV infection is easy to cure! There are now medications that are easy to take, have almost no side effects, can cure HCV in just 8-12 weeks, and are covered by Medi-Cal or other insurances. Many people who have been cured report having improved energy, less brain fog, and/or just generally feeling better!

## How many people have hepatitis C in San Francisco?

End Hep C SF estimates that in 2019, approximately 22,600 people living in San Francisco (2.6% of residents) have antibodies to HCV – which means they have HCV now or had it in the past. Of all the people with HCV antibodies, End Hep C SF estimates that about 10,000 people have either cleared the virus on their own or have been cured with medications. That leaves us with approximately 11,600 people who were living with active untreated HCV as of 2019 (about 1.3% of the total population in San Francisco).

## Are some people more likely to be living with HCV than others?

Yes. Some people are much more likely to be living with HCV than others. More than 90% of people with untreated, active HCV infection in San Francisco are people who inject drugs, even though less than 3% of people living in San Francisco inject drugs. We must do better in making sure that people who use drugs are able to access stigma-free health care and lifesaving HCV treatment! End Hep C SF has been working to make HCV treatment available to people who use drugs in San Francisco through syringe services programs, methadone programs, residential drug treatment programs, mobile vans, and more – but there is always more than can be done.

Baby boomers (people born between 1945 – 1965) make up 21% of the population, but about 27% of untreated HCV infections. More than 2 out of 3 HCV infections are among men, even though the population of San Francisco is 50% men, 49% women, and 1% trans or non-binary. Approximately 14% of low-income trans women in San Francisco (1 in 6) are living with untreated HCV infection – compared to around 1% of people in the general population.

People who inject drugs make up **90%** of active HCV infections

% of active HCV infections



% of general SF population



but are only **3%** of the total population

Baby Boomers make up **27%** of active HCV infections



but are only **21%** of the total population

Men make up **2 in 3** active HCV infections



but are only **half** of the total population

Since trans women with low income are 14 times as likely to be affected by HCV compared to the general SF population, End Hep C SF is working to improve education and access to HCV testing and treatment for this population.

If you have ever injected drugs or were born between 1945–1965, End Hep C SF recommends talking to your medical provider about testing for HCV, and starting treatment if you have HCV infection!

## How have these numbers changed since 2015?

End Hep C SF conducted a similar analysis of data back in 2015, to try to estimate the number of people living with HCV at that time. In this updated estimate four years later, we estimate that about 1,000 more people have HCV antibodies (evidence of past or present HCV infection), but about 1,000 *fewer* people have chronic HCV infection in 2019 compared to 2015. Back then we didn't have a good way to estimate the number of people who had already been treated and cured – and this new generation of safe and effective HCV treatments were still new – so it's hard to compare the total number of people with untreated HCV infection from 2015 to 2019. Now that our systems for estimating treatment numbers have improved, we will be able to make better comparisons moving forward. This means we'll be able to see the impacts of our treatment efforts more clearly in the future!

## How does San Francisco compare to the rest of the U.S. when it comes to HCV?



The estimated percentage of people with HCV antibodies in San Francisco (2.6%) is significantly higher than the national percentage (1.6%).<sup>1</sup> This isn't surprising, given that there are more people at higher risk for HCV infection (such as people who inject drugs or are unhoused) in San Francisco compared to the country overall – similar to other urban areas.

## What is End Hep C SF?

In 2016 the San Francisco Department of Public Health, University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), and more than 30 community partners came together to establish End Hep C SF, an independent consortium of community members, medical professionals, and public health workers collaborating to eliminate HCV in our city. More information about End Hep C SF is available on our website: <https://www.endhepcsf.org>.

One key part of End Hep C SF's strategic plan is to improve research about HCV in San Francisco, especially to learn more about who may be more likely to be living with HCV so we can prioritize our testing and treatment efforts accordingly. Estimating the number of people living with untreated HCV infection in San Francisco is something the Community Research and Data Stewardship (CoRDS) workgroup plans to do every 3 years or so, to track our progress toward HCV elimination.



1. Facente, et al. Hepatitis C prevalence and key population size estimate updates in San Francisco: 2015 to 2019.. MedRxiv; <https://medrxiv.org/cgi/content/short/2021.10.24.21265448v1>.

Working together, we can eliminate HCV!