

## Federal Guidelines Say All Baby Boomers Need Hepatitis C Testing

BY SANDY KLEFFMAN  
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WALNUT CREEK, Calif. — All baby boomers should be tested for hepatitis C to help avoid serious liver disease and death, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended Thursday.

The CDC estimates that one out of 30 people born from 1945 through 1965 — those now ages 47 to 67 — are infected with the deadly virus, but most are unaware of it.

Many contracted the virus decades ago when they were in their teens or twenties through blood transfusions, medical procedures or getting tattoos before widespread blood screening and other safeguards were in place, said CDC Director Thomas Frieden.

Others may have gotten it through intravenous drug use, even if they only did it once.

Baby boomers are five times more likely than other American adults to be infected with the disease.

“The longer a hepatitis C infection goes undetected, the more damage it causes,” said Dr. John Ward, director of the CDC’s division of viral hepatitis.

Hepatitis C is often called “a silent epidemic” because people may have no noticeable symptoms for decades.

Yet it can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and other illnesses, health experts say. Deaths from hepatitis C-related illnesses are increasing, reaching more than

15,000 annually.

For these reasons, the CDC announced Thursday that it is recommending that all baby boomers receive a onetime blood test for the virus. Health leaders anticipate that 800,000 new cases will be revealed and more than 120,000 lives will be saved.

Detecting the virus is important because newly available therapies can cure up to 75 percent of infections, the CDC said.

Those who know they are infected can also take steps to protect themselves by avoiding alcohol, which can accelerate liver disease.

Nationwide, nearly 3.2 million Americans are infected with the virus.

In the past, the CDC recommended screening only those who were deemed at high-risk, including people who have injected illegal drugs, received blood transfusions or organ transplants before 1992, and those living with HIV.

But the CDC decided to expand its recommendations because many baby boomers may no longer recall the events that placed them at risk.

“The test is widely available,” Ward said, adding that many insurers cover it. He urged baby boomers to talk to their doctor about it during their next checkup.

The hepatitis C virus attacks the liver and is the leading cause of liver transplants and liver cancer in the United States. It is transmitted through contaminated blood.

BY STACEY BURLING

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PHILADELPHIA — Twenty-three-year-old Paul Corby has a bad heart and a flawed mind.

The question before doctors now is whether his mental problems — he has a form of autism — are severe enough to make him a bad candidate for a heart transplant.

Doctors at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania have said they are, according to Paul’s mother, Karen. She disagrees and is using an online petition and the support of a network of autism advocates to make her case. Karen Corby says she was “stunned” by Penn’s decision, then inspired by another family’s successful fight with Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia over a similar decision.

“I guess they thought we would accept it and just wait for the inevitable,” said Corby, of Pottsville, Pa. She said she has not been told how long her son, who has a heart condition called left ventricular noncompaction, might live without a transplant.

Paul Corby initially took the decision well, but has since grown so depressed that his mother worries about how he’d react to another rejection.

“At first he was OK with it because he thought, ‘At least I don’t have to go through that surgery,’” his mother said, “and then he thought, ‘Why not? Why don’t they like me?’”

Paul Corby’s situation is a window into the complex decisions that patients and doctors face when vital organs begin to fail. Organ transplantation is one of the few areas of modern medicine with overt and unavoidable rationing. There simply are not enough donated organs to go around, so doctors must make life-and-death choices. Nationally, 331 people died while waiting for heart transplants last year.

Karen Corby released a letter she received from Penn cardiologist Susan Brozena in June 2011. In it, Brozena said that she recommended against Paul Corby’s getting a transplant “given his psychiatric issues, autism, the complexity of the process, multiple procedures and the unknown and unpredictable effect of steroids on behavior.”

Corby said her son — who is diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified — is high functioning and spends his days playing video games and writing the sequel to his pre-teen, self-published novel, Isaac the Runner. He carried his ever-present Princess Peach doll with him to his transplant evaluation. He takes medicine for an unspecified mood disorder, his mother said. He has shouted loudly enough that police have been called “three or four times” to the family’s home.

Citing privacy rules, the Penn health system said it could not comment on Paul Corby’s case. It released a written statement that said the transplant program reviews “all aspects” of a patient’s condition, including his health status and post-transplant prognosis, and other health problems that could af-

fect transplant success along with the interaction of drugs he takes and those he’ll need after the transplant.

“Our criteria for listing an individual for transplant are regularly reviewed in comparison with national standards, but we always encourage patients to seek another opinion.”

After Karen Corby said she was willing to give permission for Penn to discuss her son’s case, health system spokeswoman Susan Phillips said that “the physicians involved believe that any discussion of the specifics of his case would be most unkind to him and therefore will not comment.”

Phillips said Penn’s transplant team has performed at least one other heart transplant in an individual with autism.

Thirty-eight percent of patients evaluated for heart transplants during the last two years there were told no, mostly because of other medical conditions that would affect their survival or quality of life after a transplant, Phillips said.

Karen Corby decided to start a petition on the website change.org after reading in January about 3-year-old Amelia Rivera, who was denied a kidney transplant at Children’s because she was “mentally retarded.” Her family’s petition led to an outpouring of support. The hospital apologized and Rivera’s family now says she has been cleared for transplant.

Corby’s petition drew only about 4,000 signatures until Joslyn Gray, a freelance writer from Drexel Hill who has two children with Asperger’s disorder, also part of the autism spectrum, wrote about Paul on the Babble.com website last week. The count had climbed to about 10,700 Monday.

Gray sees an issue that can only get bigger as more children with autism get older.

While autism was just one of the reasons listed for denying Paul Corby a transplant, Gray said she was “extremely disturbed that autism in and of itself was listed as an exclusionary factor.”

With help from other parents, Karen Corby has now contacted the Mayo Clinic and two hospitals in Pittsburgh about putting Paul on their lists.

Transplant patients often face a difficult recovery and are on a complex drug regimen for the rest of their lives. The experience of being rescued from death by someone else’s death is challenging emotionally even for people who go into the experience with superior social skills.

Robert Weinrieb, a psychiatrist who specializes in working with transplant patients at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, said patients were rarely turned down for psychosocial reasons. People who are actively addicted to drugs or alcohol are excluded. In cases of serious psychiatric or cognitive problems, doctors want to know that patients have enough support from family members to manage their medications. Doctors don’t want to have to sedate patients to perform minor procedures. To make the best use of organs, patients must be willing participants in rehabilitation.

Weinrieb, who has not met Paul Corby, said the social skills deficiencies common in autism can be a problem if patients need a long hospitalization.

Steroids, which are given in high doses after transplants, greatly magnify emotions. Weinrieb likened it to drinking 20 to 30 cups of coffee. Someone who already has trouble with anger or impulsiveness is “virtually guaranteed” to get worse on the drug, he said.

Daniel L. Coury, professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Ohio State University and medical director for the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network, said it’s hard to predict who will have a hard time with steroids.

People with autism have trouble with verbal and nonverbal communication and with transitions. They often have limited interests, Coury said. Those characteristics can make them challenging patients, but there are ways to help them through difficult medical procedures. He said he had not heard anything about Corby that would disqualify him from a transplant. “To deny him outright doesn’t sound quite appropriate to me,” he said.

Karen Corby said her son is already on 19 medications, most for his heart condition. Although he always has someone with him, he takes the medicines by himself. He struggles with anxiety and has night terrors. He’s a loner. He has not been diagnosed with specific mood disorder, she said, but takes a mood stabilizer. He’s been more depressed and upset since Penn said no.

His heart problems make him breathless when he climbs stairs. He has to sleep practically sitting up. His father died of a stroke at 27 — Corby doesn’t know if he had the same heart problem — and she fears for Paul.

He spends a lot of time working on his second book. The first was about a group of kids on a quest. It’s not great literature, but it reveals an active mind. In the third chapter, the hero Isaac tells his mother he’s embarking on a quest. “Do you mind if I go out for adventure?” he asks. “Rick’s candy has been stolen from an evil ogre robot Chris Jerky.”

During a visit last week, Paul answered questions with short, simple sentences, mostly averting his eyes. He is a pudgy young man with freckles and an auburn beard. There was no hint of emotion in his face even when he described strong feelings.

He said he worries about going out sometimes. “I feel like I might get nervous, and I might act out in public.” Asked how he acts out, he said, “I push people. I break things.” His mother said medication helps with that.

Autism, he said, has made him creative. He still feels “desperate” for a transplant. He’s tired of being tired all the time and he’s not scared of the surgery or a long stay in the hospital.

“I don’t care how long I’m in there,” Paul Corby said. “I just want my life to be saved. That’s all.”

## Virus Likely Contracted At Yosemite Kills Man

BY SANDY KLEFFMAN  
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WALNUT CREEK, Calif. — A 37-year-old Northern California man died and a Southern California woman is recovering after contracting the rare hantavirus, most likely after being exposed to mouse droppings or urine while vacationing at Curry Village in Yosemite National Park, health leaders said Thursday.

The two stayed in separate tent cabins in Curry Village in mid-June and fell ill several weeks later.

The state health department informed park officials two days ago that tests revealed the hantavirus in mouse droppings there, said Ranger Kari Cobb.

She noted that park employees have since scrubbed and inspected buildings and taken steps to limit entry points for rodents, things they do routinely.

“Visitors should not be afraid to stay here,” Cobb said.

This marks the first death of someone believed to have contracted the hantavirus at Yosemite.

One person became infected in 2000 and another in 2010. Both survived. Cobb said they had stayed in Tuolumne Meadows.

People can become ill with the hantavirus through contact with the urine, droppings or saliva of infected wild mice. The most common means of infection is breathing small particles that have become airborne.

Symptoms typically develop one to six weeks after exposure and include fever, headache and muscle ache. Once victims become sick, they can rapidly develop difficulty in breathing, known as pulmonary syndrome, and in some cases die.

Since the hantavirus was first identified in 1993, 587 cases have been discovered nationally.

People are typically exposed to the hantavirus in areas where deer mice live, especially at higher elevations and in the eastern Sierra Nevada region.

The latest two infections bring the total number of hantavirus cases in California this year to four.

The man who died at the end of July was a resident of Alameda County, said Alameda County Health Department spokeswoman Sherri Willis. She declined to reveal more details because of federal privacy laws.

State health officials said the woman who is recovering is in her 40s and lives in the Inland Empire region east of Los Angeles.

### S.D. Breastfeeding Coalition To Hold Summit

BROOKINGS — The South Dakota Breastfeeding Coalition will hold the first Regional Breastfeeding Summit on Monday, Oct. 8, running from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Swiftel Center in Brookings. The event will be hosted by Brookings Health System.

Keynote presenters include Linda J. Smith, an internationally known lactation consultant and author, and Dr. Raylene Phillips, a neonatologist at the Department of Pediatrics at Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital, Loma Linda, Calif.

Smith will present on the topics, “Impact of Birth Practices on Breastfeeding,” “Safe Sleep” and “What Makes Milk?”

Phillips will cover “Skin-to-Skin Care in the First Hour” and “Breast Milk and Newborn Challenges: Evidence-Based Practice.”

All individuals who support breastfeeding mothers and babies should attend the summit, including IBCLCs, physicians, nurses, doulas, WIC, childbirth educators, nutritionists, and students. Parents and anyone in the general public interested in breastfeeding topics and issues are also welcome to attend.

In addition to the summit, a free community forum with Smith will be held at 7 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7, in Brookings Health System’s conference rooms A and B.

For more information or to register for the summit, visit [www.sdbreastfeedingcoalition.com](http://www.sdbreastfeedingcoalition.com).

## Ex-Smokers Share Stories At Conference

BY ALAN BAVLEY

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — If you’ve ever seen Terrie Hall on television, you’ll not soon forget her.

She’s the ex-smoker and cancer survivor who starts her day by inserting her false teeth, plugging an electronic voicebox into her throat and donning a wig in one of the most searing anti-smoking television commercials ever aired.

Hall and two other ex-smokers who appeared in similar commercials this spring got a standing ovation on Wednesday at the opening session of the National Conference on Tobacco or Health meeting at the Kansas City Convention Center.

More than 2,000 anti-smoking advocates and researchers from across the country will be in Kansas City, Mo., through Friday comparing strategies for combating tobacco use. Timed to the beginning of the conference, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released a progress report on anti-smoking efforts during the Obama administration.

A resurgent drive is under way by the federal government to use money, media and regulation to push down a national smoking rate that has stayed stubbornly close to 20 percent of adults for the better part of a decade. The “Tips from Former Smokers” TV campaign that featured Hall has been a notably successful part of that effort.

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The 12-week “Tips” campaign, which started in mid-March, is credited with getting at least 500,000 smokers to try to quit. An estimated 50,000 succeeded. The commercials featured harrowing stories of people whose smoking led to heart attacks, amputations and other ordeals.

“These heroes turned their personal anguish into public action,” Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Howard Koh told the conference audience as he introduced Hall and the other former smokers. “We are proud of your courage.”

Hall, 52, has battled oral and throat cancers since she was 40. In North Carolina, where she lives, she visits schools to tell her story.

“I want to help save lives. I don’t want anyone to go through what I’ve been through,” she said.

Since 2009, a flurry of federal legislation has taken aim at tobacco.

The economic stimulus poured \$200 million into local, state and national tobacco-control programs. The federal tax on cigarettes was increased by 62 cents. The Food and Drug Administration was authorized to regulate tobacco products, and the Affordable Care Act expanded tobacco cessation coverage in Medicare and Medicaid.

Among the initiatives under way that federal officials discussed at the conference:

- The National Cancer Institute

is using Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, websites and mobile apps to help people quit smoking. “For the feds, this is like mind-meltingly cutting edge,” institute psychologist Erik Auguston said.

- The FDA has banned candy and fruit-flavored cigarettes and ordered cigarette manufacturers to disclose the contents of their products. The agency also has inspected more than 80,000 retailers for illegal sales and advertising. Sales to minors are at an all-time low.

The FDA last year ordered controversial health-warning pictures on cigarette packs, but the rule has been tied up in court.

- The Department of Housing and Urban Development is urging local housing authorities to adopt smoke-free public housing policies. So far, more than 300 have done so, said HUD assistant secretary Sandra Henriquez.

- The FDA and the National Institutes of Health are collaborating on a study that will follow over time at least 60,000 people who smoke, or are at risk of starting, to learn why people initiate smoking

and identify ways that they stop.

During the conference, researchers will be presenting hundreds of new studies, including provocative findings about the tobacco industry.

One study by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco traced the lineage of the “tea party” movement to groups that received industry money in the 1990s.

A study by the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota tracked promotional mailings by tobacco companies for discount coupons, contests, gifts and prizes. Smokers sign up for the mailings through websites or recruiters they meet at bars or events.

These promotions now account for far more of the industry’s marketing budget than advertising does, said researcher Betsy Brock.

“A lot of people think we’ve solved (the issue of tobacco marketing). There’s not much advertising anymore, but there’s this invisible stuff,” she said.

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