

**Position paper #03-0209 (February 2009)**

**Title: Medicaid Coverage of Hepatitis A and B Vaccine for Adults**

**Prepared by:** The Florida Viral Hepatitis Council (VHC). The VHC is a partnership between the state of Florida, Department of Health (DOH) and non-governmental community members that provides guidance to the DOH Hepatitis Prevention Program and is responsible for writing a comprehensive hepatitis prevention plan. The group is made up of twenty members from medical, public health, academic, research, clinical and other related areas. The VHC meets twice a year and includes consumers (individuals who have been diagnosed and treated for viral hepatitis) in its membership.

**Goal:** Provide hepatitis A and B vaccines to eligible adults.

**Statement of the Problem:** According to estimates based on a formula developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 120,000 Floridians are infected with hepatitis B. According to the American Public Health Association book, *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual* (18<sup>th</sup> Edition), 15% to 25% of individuals with chronic hepatitis B will die prematurely of either liver cirrhosis or liver cancer. Both nationally and in Florida, the highest rates of hepatitis B are in persons 25-39 years old. Most Floridians under the age of 25 are protected because of hepatitis B vaccine provided in infancy or upon entering the seventh grade.

Acute hepatitis B may develop into chronic infection, followed by cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), end-stage liver disease, and cancer. During specific stages of disease, hepatitis B is transmissible through contact with infected body fluids (Such as: blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and any body fluid containing blood).

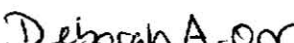
In December of 2006, CDC released recommendations for the elimination of hepatitis B in adults in the United States. CDC's recommendations include providing hepatitis B vaccine to adults 25-49 in county health department STD and HIV clinics, in jails and prisons and at substance abuse treatment centers. Indeed, any adult with a risk and not already infected or vaccinated would benefit from the hepatitis B vaccine series.

CDC recommends hepatitis A vaccine in all children 12-24 months old. Not every state has adopted this recommendation. Since the introduction of hepatitis A vaccine in 1995, the number of cases of the disease has steadily declined. Hepatitis A vaccine is also recommended for adults at risk of the disease, such as: men who have sex with men and people who use street drugs.

Hepatitis A and hepatitis B are among the most frequently reported vaccine preventable diseases in the United States and in Florida. Expert advisory panels

have determined that vaccinating at-risk adults for hepatitis A and B is an efficient and cost effective strategy for preventing complications in individuals with chronic liver disease if they are not already immune. With adequate vaccine availability in the venues where individuals at risk are found, both diseases could be virtually eliminated in the United States.

**Recommendation:** The Viral Hepatitis Council recommends that the Medicaid Program allow for coverage of the vaccination of eligible, at-risk adults for hepatitis A and B.

  
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