

On October 30th, 2009, I was joined by a bi-partisan group of 11 other Members of Congress as I introduced important legislation to improve and expand the federal response to the silent viral hepatitis epidemic in our nation. [H.R.3974, the Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Control Act would amend the Public Health Service Act](#) to establish, promote, and support comprehensive prevention, research, and medical management referral programs for these and others fighting viral hepatitis.

Viral hepatitis is highly infectious – 100 times more infectious than HIV – but most people are unaware of the devastating long term consequences of chronic viral hepatitis B and C infection. Untreated, they can cause liver disease, liver cancer, and premature death decades after infection. It is estimated that 2 billion people worldwide have been infected with the hepatitis B virus, 400 million chronically. Approximately 170 million people worldwide are chronically infected with the hepatitis C virus. An estimated 5.3 million people living in the United States are infected with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C; tragically more than half are unaware of their status.

Although the incidence of infection in the United States has declined over the past several decades, there are still tens of thousands of people every year who are infected with hepatitis. Furthermore, Americans approaching retirement come from a generation before the hepatitis B vaccine and before treatment for hepatitis C was developed. Seniors, immigrants and children of immigrants from countries with high endemic infection rates of viral hepatitis, African Americans and Asian American and Pacific Islanders are particularly vulnerable. A recent article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (found [here](#)) makes the strong point that a robust federal policy approach is needed.

My bill will increase the authority of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support state health departments in their prevention, immunization and surveillance efforts. The CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis has been dramatically underfunded in comparison with other CDC programs within the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. Increasing the authority of the Division will help to boost the argument for increased funding. This legislation is an important step forward and I look forward to the passage of the bill.

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