

# INTRODUCTION

## Pediatric Hepatitis Report

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If the world was a village of 1,000 people:

- At least 500 would have been infected with hepatitis A, most during childhood.\*
- 200 would have contracted hepatitis E during their lifetimes.
- 60 would have chronic hepatitis B, most of whom would have contracted it during childhood.
- 30 would have hepatitis C.
- 2 would have hepatitis D.

According to these estimates, at least 79 percent of the world's population has been infected with some type of viral hepatitis. This disease exacts a heavy toll on the world and its children. It is during childhood that most people contract viral hepatitis, especially hepatitis A and B.

Several factors contribute to this global pandemic. To date, the only vaccines available are for hepatitis A and B.

In developing countries, drinking water and food contaminated by the feces of those infected with hepatitis E and A cause millions of new infections each year.

Vertical transmission from mother to child and exposure to infected friends and family contribute to the prevalence of hepatitis B. Historically, contaminated blood supplies caused many hepatitis C virus infections.

Unsafe or improperly sterilized injections continue to contribute heavily to the spread of hepatitis B and C viruses.

Despite the universal shadow viral hepatitis casts, there has been surprisingly little written about how these diseases impact children. The reason it has escaped the lens of the medical world is simple. In children, nearly all forms of viral hepatitis are "silent," with few, if any, tell-tale symptoms.

But as infected children grow into adults, hepatitis B, C and D can lead to cirrhosis and

liver cancer, a leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide. Over 40 percent of all liver transplants in the United States are performed on adults with hepatitis B and C. If these diseases can be prevented and cured during childhood, this devastating liver disease can be avoided.

Today, families who learn their children have hepatitis B or C find little information about how these diseases impact children and what the latest medical treatments are in the pediatric population.

Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases (PKIDs) created this report, with partial funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to fill that void. As an organization that knows all too well the toll viral hepatitis takes, it was our goal to create a comprehensive overview of all types of viral hepatitis and examine how these diseases affect children and what treatments are available. Sadly, we have found there are still many unanswered questions about disease progression and effective treatment in children.

Another important goal was to examine the human toll these infectious diseases exact on children and their families. That is why we included personal stories and sections dedicated to talking to children about their disease and what legal protections are available to children attending schools and daycare centers.

We at PKIDs hope this report will help parents, educators, social workers, medical practitioners and others understand this disease and empower parents and caregivers to demand appropriate medical care and equal rights for all touched by these diseases.

PKIDs looks forward to the day when universal vaccination against hepatitis B and A make those diseases extinct. We applaud efforts to develop effective vaccines against hepatitis C and E. We promote development of effective wastewater treatment and sanitary drinking water supplies to greatly decrease the incidences of hepatitis A and E around the world.

Most of all, we look forward to the day when there are effective preventions and cures for all forms of viral hepatitis. We wait anxiously for the day when viral hepatitis is rendered extinct.

*\* There is no known global average for hepatitis A virus exposure. According to CDC and the World Health Organization, infection rates range from about 30 percent in the United States to 100 percent in many developing countries that make up most of the world's population. The 50 percent exposure rate cited here is an estimate based on regional infection rates provided by the World Health Organization.*