

SF Hep B Free and Peninsula Health Care District lead the fight to eliminate hepatitis B in San Mateo County

Multipronged San Mateo Hep B Initiative announced and new U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance recommends testing all adults ages 18 for hepatitis B.

Millbrae, CA, April 9th 2023 - SF Hep B Free - Bay Area and the Peninsula Health Care District announce the kickoff to the multipronged San Mateo Hep B Initiative to fight hepatitis B along with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) new guidance, recommending testing all adults ages 18 and older for hepatitis B. This initiative aims to dramatically improve knowledge, screening, and vaccination rates among San Mateo County residents.

An estimated 81,000 Bay Area residents have chronic hepatitis B, a disease that makes those infected 100 times more likely to develop liver cancer. Yet two-thirds of those infected are unaware due to low rates of screening and little to no symptoms for those infected. As a result, hundreds of Bay Area residents are dying from this preventable disease each year.

California State Treasurer Fiona Ma, who is chronically infected with hepatitis B herself, said, "I was told that I was a healthy carrier of hepatitis B and that there was nothing to worry about. But if it wasn't for SF Hep B Free, and initiatives like this, I might not be here today." There are more than 300,000 Californians who also have hep B. Given the deadly effects of this disease, we can't be silent about hep B; we need to sound the alarm!"

The year-long, multipronged initiative, the San Mateo County Hep B Initiative, will fight hepatitis B through a public awareness media campaign, local community and business education, along with screenings, physician education and partnerships with retail pharmacies.

"We are proud to support this work. This is a winnable fight. Now more than ever, we have all the tools necessary to beat hepatitis B and the liver cancer it causes," Dr. Larry Cappel, Chair of the Peninsula Health Care District Board said. "Early screening and vaccination will eliminate hepatitis B in our community and beyond. We just need to get the word out."

With the passage of the universal hep B screening recommendation a unique trifecta was created. In October 2021, California passed a law (AB 789) to require hep B and hep C tests to be offered in the primary care setting. In February 2022, the CDC issued hep B vaccination recommendation for ages 19-59, infants, adolescents (who have not been vaccinated before) and those 60 and older, who are at risk or desire a hep B vaccine. Just last month, the CDC issued universal adult hep B screening recommendations.

"The Hep B Trifecta has set the groundwork for California to lead the nation in the fight against hepatitis B and with collaboration between the community, physicians, and health care systems, the state can be the first to truly eliminate hep B, said Richard So, Executive Director of SF Hep B Free. "It is a dream we can actually achieve."

San Mateo County Supervisor Dave Pine and Millbrae City Councilmember Anders Fung also celebrated the launch, commenting on the immense need in the communities they represent.

Historically, both hepatitis B screening and vaccination recommendations depended on a complex risk-based assessment, burdening physicians and patients alike, and increasing barriers to both services. Furthermore, despite Many Asian Americans and other minority populations being at high risk for hepatitis B infection, no law required hepatitis B or hepatitis C testing. However, the recent updates should dramatically decrease these barriers because screening and vaccination would likely be offered to almost every adult patient and in many cases, be required by law. Beating hepatitis B is in reach.

About SF Hep B Free Bay Area

San Francisco Hep B Free - Bay Area is a multicounty campaign to turn the San Francisco Bay Area into the first hepatitis B free area in the nation. Their mission is to provide free and low-cost hepatitis B testing, educate the community and physicians on hepatitis B, and promote routine testing and vaccination for Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) adults at risk. For more information, go to: www.SFHepBFree.org

About Peninsula Health Care District

Founded in 1947, the Peninsula Health Care District serves the communities of San Bruno, Millbrae, Burlingame, Hillsborough, San Mateo and Foster City by supporting the unique health and wellness priorities of our vibrant Peninsula communities, and safeguarding access to health care services, today and in the future. PHCD fulfills its commitment to the community through oversight of District assets and infrastructure, planning for future health care needs, and investing taxpayer dollars in local health-focused organizations and programs. To learn more about PHCD, visit www.peninsulahealthcaredistrict.org