**Hepatitis B Testing for Liver Cancer Control Among Korean Americans**

**Introduction:** In Los Angeles County, Koreans surpass all other groups with respect to liver cancer incidence and mortality. An estimated 80%-85% of all liver cancer is etiologically related to chronic hepatitis B viral infection. Hepatitis B serologic testing of adult immigrants from highly endemic areas such as Asia is recommended as the first step in the control of hepatitis B infection and associated morbidities including liver cancer.

**Objective:** To collect pilot data to obtain an initial understanding of hepatitis B serologic testing and vaccination rates and associated knowledge and beliefs in a community sample of Korean adults (N=141, 85% foreign born, mean age 45 years) in the greater Los Angeles area.

**Design:** Cross-sectional survey.

**Setting:** Five Korean Christian churches and one Korean-serving primary care clinic.

**Results:** The hepatitis B serologic testing rate in our sample was 56%. Approximately one quarter of those tested reported that they were either chronic carriers or were immune as a result of a previous infection. Of those who remained susceptible to future infections, only 38% reported having been vaccinated. Constructs from our conceptual model, the Health Behavior Framework, were significant predictors of serologic testing, including hepatitis B knowledge, barriers to testing, and receipt of a physician’s recommendation to get tested.

**Conclusion:** Findings suggest that intervention research is urgently needed to increase hepatitis B awareness and testing among Korean American adults with subsequent vaccination and followup as indicated. (Ethn Dis. 2007;17:365–373)

**Key Words:** Health Behavior Framework, Hepatitis B Knowledge, Hepatitis B Serological Testing, Korean American Adults, Liver Cancer Control, Prevention

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Liver cancer rates vary 100-fold worldwide, with high-risk regions mainly concentrated in Asia. In the United States, Asians have the highest liver cancer incidence and mortality rates compared to all other racial/ethnic populations. Among Asians, Vietnamese have the highest incidence rates, followed by Koreans and Chinese. However, in Los Angeles County, Koreans surpass all other groups with respect to both liver cancer incidence and mortality. Incidence rates for liver and intrahepatic bile duct cancer among Koreans living in Los Angeles County have been estimated at 24.8 per 100,000 in comparison to 3.3 per 100,000 among Caucasians. Although liver cancers only account for 1.5% of all cancer cases, the prognosis for those who develop the disease is extremely poor, with five-year survival rates <10%. An estimated 80%-85% of all liver cancer is etiologically related to chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection.

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is a double-stranded DNA virus that is transmitted via bodily fluids. The virus can be transmitted vertically from mother to child during birth or horizontally through sexual exposures, percutaneous exposure (eg, blood transfusions and sharing intravenous or acupuncture needles), as well as by close person-to-person contact such as sharing a razor, toothbrush, or pierced earrings with infected persons, presumably through open cuts and sores.

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is relatively stable in the environment and has been estimated to be 50–100 times more infectious than HIV. Infection with HBV can cause a range of clinical manifestations, varying between acute and chronic disease. Following an acute episode, the infected individual may resolve the infection and acquire immunity, may resolve the infection but not acquire immunity, or continue to remain infected. Infected individuals can progress to chronic HBV infection with associated liver inflammation and other symptoms or remain in an inactive carrier status. Both groups can pass the virus to others they come in close contact with. No curative treatments for chronic hepatitis B exist, but a few antiviral agents are available for suppression and remission of the disease in patients with certain clinical features. Chronic HBV infection carries a liver cancer risk that is 200 times greater than among those not infected.

A safe and effective vaccine against HBV infection has been available since the early 1980s, and initial public health efforts in the United States were focused on vaccinating individuals engaged in high-risk drug and sexual behaviors. Since 1991, universal immunization of infants has been recommended by multiple organizations including the Centers for Disease Control and Pre-