

HEPATITIS AWARENESS MONTH - HEPATITIS C IN WASHOE COUNTY, 2021-2024

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Introduction

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month, so this Epi-News discusses local data from hepatitis C cases reported in Washoe County between Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) years 2021 and 2024. Hepatitis C is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). It can be an acute disease but about half of infected persons go on to develop chronic disease, which can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death. Currently in the US, most persons become infected with HCV by sharing needles or other equipment used to inject drugs. Many people do not have symptoms and may not know they are infected. While there is no vaccine to prevent the disease, there are treatments that can cure infection.^[1]

In 2020, CDC issued [universal adult and pregnancy screening guidelines](#). In 2023, CDC issued updated recommendations for [complete and accurate HCV testing](#) and [perinatal HCV testing](#).

Epidemiology

Between 2021 and 2024, 2,106 persons with hepatitis C were reported to Northern Nevada Public Health (NNPH). Upon investigation, NNPH found that 1,024 (49%) of these persons were not currently infected with HCV. Of the remaining 1,082 confirmed and probable cases, 22 (2%) were acute and 1,060 (98%) were chronic.

Annual case counts ranged from a low of 188 in 2024 to a peak of 379 in 2022 (Table 1). Case counts of chronic disease have been trending downward in recent years while acute counts are rising.

Table 1: Confirmed and probable cases of hepatitis C reported by year and diagnosis, Washoe County, 2021-2024.

Year	Acute	Chronic	Perinatal	Total
2021	4	305	0	309
2022	5	374	0	379
2023	6	200	0	206
2024	7	181	0	188

Source: NNPH hepatitis surveillance data

Table 2. Comparison of select demographics between acute and chronic hepatitis C cases, Washoe County, 2021-2024.

		Acute		Chronic	
		#	%	#	%
Sex	Male	16	73%	656	62%
	Female	6	27%	402	38%
	Unknown	0	0%	2	0%
Race	American Indian / Alaskan Native	0	0%	27	3%
	Asian	1	5%	19	2%
	Black / African-American	1	5%	73	7%
	Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0	0%	0	0%
	White	18	82%	846	80%
	Other	1	5%	27	3%
	Multiple	1	5%	26	2%
	Unknown	0	0%	42	4%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	4	18%	102	10%
	Non-Hispanic	17	77%	868	82%
	Unknown	1	5%	90	8%
Age Group	0-19	1	5%	2	0%
	20-29	3	14%	105	10%
	30-39	3	14%	217	20%
	40-49	5	23%	174	16%
	50-59	7	32%	230	22%
	60+	3	14%	331	31%
	Unknown	0	0%	1	0%

Source: NNPH hepatitis surveillance data

Acute Hepatitis C

Cases of acute disease ranged from a low of 4 in 2021 (incidence rate of 0.8 per 100,000) to a high of 7 in 2024 (incidence rate of 1.4 per 100,000). Nationally, the most recent incidence rate for acute disease (2023) was reported at 1.5 per 100,000, so Washoe County has a lower incidence of acute disease compared to rest of the nation.^[1]

By race, the vast majority (82%) were white, while the remainder were Asian (5%), Black (5%), Other (5%), or identified with multiple races (5%) (Table 2). By ethnicity, 18% identified as Hispanic and 77% as non-Hispanic. Sixteen cases (73%) were male and six (27%) were female. Nationally, in 2023, 67% of acute cases were male.^[1]

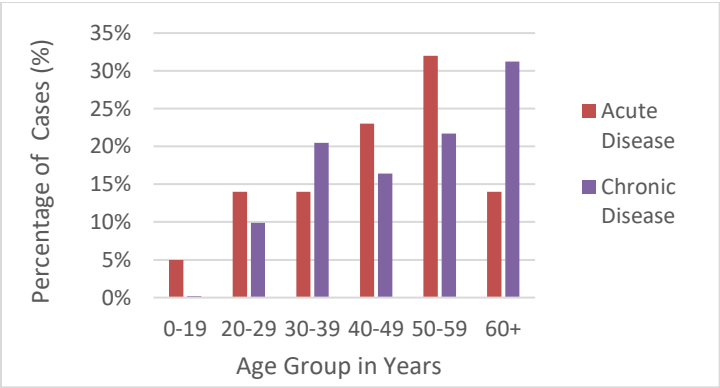
By age, most acute cases in Washoe County were reported among the 50-59 age group (n=7). This value differs from national data in 2023, where most cases of acute disease were reported in the 30-39 age group.

Nationally the greatest risk for acute hepatitis C infection is injection drug use (IDU). In the US in 2023, 43% of cases with known risk factor data reported IDU. In Washoe County, six of the fourteen (43%) acute cases from 2021 to 2024 with risk factor data reported IDU, in line with national statistics.

Chronic Hepatitis C

Almost all reports (98%) of hepatitis C in Washoe County are chronic. In 2023, the national incidence rate of chronic hepatitis C was 36.2 per 100,000.^[1] In Washoe County, incidence rates ranged widely from a low of 35.2 per 100,000 in 2024 to more than double that of 75.4 per 100,000 in 2022. As case counts have fallen in recent years, so has the incidence rate. Currently, incidence rates in Washoe County are similar to that of the nation (39.5 and 35.2 per 100,000 in 2023 and 2024, respectively).

Figure 1: Percentage of acute and chronic hepatitis C cases by age group, Washoe County, 2021-2024.



Similar to acute disease, cases of chronic hepatitis C in Washoe County are predominantly male (62%), white (80%), and non-Hispanic (82%) (Table 2).

However, there are differences by age, with cases of chronic disease reported most commonly in the oldest age group (60+ years) but less frequently in younger age groups (Fig. 1).

Recommendations

- 1. **CDC recommends universal HCV screenings for all adults and all pregnant women in the U.S.,** except in locations where the prevalence is less than 0.1%. Testing is also recommended for people with recognized risk factors or exposures. Nearly one in three people with hepatitis C are unaware of their status and may continue to infect others, so testing is critical. Those currently infected should be counseled and referred for treatment.^[2]
- 2. **Initiate hepatitis C testing with an HCV antibody test with reflex to a nucleic acid test (NAT) for HCV RNA if the antibody test is positive/reactive** to determine if the person has a current infection. Half (49%) of persons reported to NNPH for hepatitis C were not currently infected with HCV.^[2]

Reporting

The list of reportable communicable diseases and reporting forms can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/WashoeDiseaseReporting>

Report communicable diseases to Northern Nevada Public Health. To report a communicable disease, please call 775-328-2447 or fax your report to the NNPH at 775-328-3764.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to all health care providers, infection control practitioners, laboratory staff, as well as schools and daycares for their reporting and collaboration to make this work possible.

References

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Viral Hepatitis Surveillance Report – United States, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis-surveillance-2023/about/index.html> Published April 2025. Accessed 14 May 2025.

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Clinical Screening and Diagnosis for Hepatitis C. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis-c/hcp/diagnosis-testing/>. Updated 31 Jan 2025.. Accessed 14 May 2025.