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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 May 12, 2011

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HHS Announces Action Plan to Prevent and Treat Viral Hepatitis

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services today launched its action plan to prevent and treat viral hepatitis, a silent epidemic affecting 3.5 – 5.3 million Americans.

Though viral hepatitis is a leading infectious cause of death in the U.S., many people who have it don't know they are infected, so they are at greater risk for severe – or even fatal – complications of the disease. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that health care providers often lack the appropriate training to conduct risk assessments, offer prevention counseling, provide diagnoses and treat viral hepatitis.

"These infections have fueled a tragic cascade of human suffering," said Howard K. Koh, MD, MPH. "The new HHS action plan on viral hepatitis represents an unprecedented call to action for better education, treatment and prevention."

In January 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report on hepatitis, highlighting barriers that impede efforts for hepatitis prevention and control. The new HHS plan -- *Combating the Silent Epidemic: US Department of Health and Human Services Action Plan for the Prevention, Care and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis* -- is a response to the IOM report. It outlines a comprehensive action plan to raise awareness about viral hepatitis; creates more opportunities to train health professionals to diagnose, treat, vaccinate, and ultimately save lives; and builds upon the new health insurance reform law to improve patient access to comprehensive viral hepatitis-related prevention and treatment services through expanded coverage.

The plan's success is contingent on leadership of government at all levels and the active and informed participation of communities, non-governmental organizations, health care providers, and the private sector.

"No one government agency can fight viral hepatitis alone, and here at CDC, we believe this action plan will not only strengthen the work we've been doing, but help all of us across the government collaborate to take our nation's prevention efforts to the next level," said CDC Director [Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH](#). "Far too many Americans are unaware of the serious impact of viral hepatitis and the devastating consequences that can result from leaving it untreated. The time for action is now."

"We have seen the increasing prevalence of viral hepatitis in our network of health centers and among people living with HIV/AIDS in underserved areas and we know that minorities and medically vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected," said Health Resources and Services Administrator Mary K. Wakefield, RN, PhD. "This action plan is our best chance at stopping the disease with increased access to information and quality care for those at risk and those who are already infected.

HHS is committed to ensuring that new cases of viral hepatitis are prevented and that persons who are already infected are tested, informed about their infection, and provided with optimal counseling, care and treatment. This increasing commitment is evidenced in the new *Healthy People 2020* plan, the first *Healthy People* publication to document increasing viral hepatitis awareness among infected persons as a formal HHS objective.

To read the plan, see <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/hepatitis>. For more information on viral hepatitis, see <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/>

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.

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