

Michael J. Nesheiwat, M.D.
Interim Commissioner of Health



MaryEllen Odell
County Executive

Robert Morris, P.E., M.P.H.
Director of Environmental Health

Department of Health
1 Geneva Road, Brewster, New York 10509
(845) 808-1390

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Barbara Haldi, Public Information Officer, (845) 808-1390

**Free Hepatitis C Testing at PCDOH on May 19;
All Baby Boomers Advised to Have One-Time Test**

BREWSTER, NY—The Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH) is offering free Hepatitis C testing on National Hepatitis C Testing Day, Thursday, May 19, for all New York State baby boomers. While anyone can get “Hep C,” baby boomers born from 1945 through 1965 are five times more likely to have the virus. Testing starts at 10 a.m. and runs until 5 p.m. at the main health department office at 1 Geneva Road in Brewster. No appointment is necessary.

“Health officials encourage everyone in this age category to take this one-time test, regardless of any specific risk,” says County Executive MaryEllen Odell.

“The reason baby boomers have high rates of Hep C is not completely understood,” explains Interim Health Commissioner, Michael Nesheiwat, M.D., “but the fact is that 75 percent of infected adults were born in these years. Most are believed to have been infected in the 1970s and 1980s when infection rates were highest. The danger with this infection is that you can live with it for decades without feeling sick, but long-term it can cause liver failure, cirrhosis and cancer.”

Hep C is primarily spread through contact with infected blood. Many baby boomers could have gotten infected from contaminated blood and blood products before widespread screening of the blood supply in 1992. Others may have become infected from injecting drugs, even if only once in the past. Many baby boomers however don’t know how or when they were infected.

More than 3 million Americans are living with this viral disease, and 75 percent of them are unaware of their infection. The longer an individual lives with the infection untreated, the more likely they are to develop serious, life-threatening liver disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, viral hepatitis is a leading infectious cause of death in the U.S.

There is no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C. Getting tested is the best way to know so treatment can be started as soon as possible. For many people, treatment can cure Hepatitis C and prevent liver damage, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Residents who can't make the Free Testing Day on May 19, can call the health department at 845-808-1390 for information about other free testing opportunities.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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