

135.20 Hepatitis C awareness program veterans vaccinations.

1. The department shall establish and administer a hepatitis C awareness program. The goal of the program shall be to distribute information to veterans regarding the higher incidence of hepatitis C exposure and infection among veterans, the dangers presented by the disease, and contacts for additional information and referrals. For purposes of this section, "*veteran*" means an individual meeting the definition contained in section 35.1.

2. The information to be distributed shall be determined by the department by rule, in consultation with the department of veterans affairs. The information shall, at a minimum, contain statements indicating that:

a. The federal department of veterans affairs estimates a hepatitis C infection rate in veterans more than three times higher than for the general population.

b. The infection rate for Vietnam veterans is estimated to be even higher than for other veterans groups.

c. The disease is caused by a bloodborne virus readily transmitted during combat and combat-related emergency medical treatment.

d. Many veterans currently carrying the virus were infected prior to the development of medical screening tests.

e. The hepatitis C virus often resolves into a chronic infection without symptoms for ten to thirty years before signs of resultant liver disease appear.

f. This unusually long latency period makes it difficult to connect current symptoms with an infection that may have actually been contracted during military service decades ago.

The information shall also present treatment options and shall specify a procedure to be followed for veterans desiring a medical consultation for screening and treatment purposes. The department shall cooperate with the department of veterans affairs regarding distribution of the information to the veterans home, the county commissions of veteran affairs, veterans hospitals, and other appropriate points of distribution.

2005 Acts, ch 115, §27, 40; 2007 Acts, ch 202, §11, 12