

## FINDINGS FROM THE JACKSONVILLE JAIL HEPATITIS PILOT PROGRAM

In October 1999, the Bureau of HIV/AIDS and the Florida Department of Corrections received funding to establish a corrections demonstration project called Linking Inmates Needing Care (LINC) in the Jacksonville Jail. The goal of the LINC program is to identify incarcerated individuals with HIV and STDs and to assist in planning for services needed after their release. Ex-offenders are followed in the community for up to six months to determine the effect of service interventions.

In the fall of 2002, the bureau received supplemental project funding to enhance the HIV and STD screening program to include viral hepatitis testing and vaccination for male and female inmates. Many inmates in jails have a history of behaviors that put them at higher risk for infection with HIV and hepatitis. Hepatitis A is passed to people through fecal-oral transmission (poor hygiene, eating contaminated food, having oral-anal sex). Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood and body fluids from activities such as unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex and sharing injection drug equipment. Hepatitis C is transmitted through contact with an infected person's blood. While viral hepatitis can be fatal for anyone, HIV-infected people infected by any form of viral hepatitis are especially affected because their immune systems are compromised.

In January 2003, the hepatitis screening and vaccination protocol was developed for the Jacksonville Jail. This protocol required that a hepatitis risk assessment be offered to inmates between 72 and 96 hours after arrest (during the initial physical examination). Inmates at risk for hepatitis were tested and received their first vaccinations simultaneously; subsequent vaccine doses were given as indicated by test results. There were challenges to implementing this protocol. Originally, a medical assistant was hired through the jail's private medical provider to do screenings and vaccinations, as well as input data into a central database. This proved to be problematic as there was no direct supervision from the Duval County Health Department (DCHD). As an alternative, the DCHD hired a part-time data entry operator and a medical technician to screen and vaccinate on-site. Since the county health department (CHD) was initially responsible for purchasing all of the vaccinations, inmates were required to enroll with the health department before receiving hepatitis services. As the program became an ongoing part of the initial physical examination at the Jacksonville Jail, inmate fears and mistrust were somewhat alleviated.

Since the program was implemented in February 2003, over 1,900 inmates have been screened for viral hepatitis (Table 1). Of these, 252 (13.2%) were positive for hepatitis C antibody (meaning they were infected in the past and may be able to transmit the virus to others) and 341 (17.9%) were positive for hepatitis A antibody (meaning they had been previously exposed and are now immune). There were 38

**Table 1. Total Number of Inmates Tested for Viral Hepatitis, Jacksonville Jail, February 2003 through November 2003.**

Hepatitis Marker	Total Tested	Total Positive	% Positive
Hepatitis A	1,900	341	17.9%
Hepatitis B surface antigen	1,921	38	2.0%
Hepatitis B surface antibody	1,917	588	30.7%
Hepatitis B core antibody	1,911	357	18.7%
Hepatitis C antibody	1,914	252	13.2%

(2.0%) inmates who tested positive for hepatitis B surface antigen, and were therefore able to transmit the virus. In addition, approximately 30% (588) of the inmates were positive for hepatitis B surface antibody (they are immune) and 18.7% (357) were positive for hepatitis B core antibody (they were previously infected).

Table 2 displays the total number of hepatitis vaccine doses provided. Between January and November 2003, 988 doses of hepatitis vaccine were given to 653 inmates. Due to the short length of stay for inmates, many were released before completing the hepatitis vaccine regimen.

**Table 2. Doses of Hepatitis Vaccine Administered, Jacksonville Jail, February 2003 through November 2003.**

Vaccine Type	Total Doses Given	Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3
Hepatitis A (only)	56	50	6	NA
Hepatitis B (only)	52	39	13	0
Hepatitis A and B (Combo vaccine)	880	564	312	4
Total Vaccine Doses	988	653	331	4

Once released from jail, inmates are referred to the Duval CHD, STD clinic to finish their vaccinations. Inmates who tested positive for viral hepatitis are referred to services that will help improve their quality of life and reduce the spread of infection.

There were several lessons learned during the first year of this program: 1) keep this hepatitis program separate from the LINC program to ensure the effectiveness of both, 2) administer the first dose of each vaccine at the same time blood is drawn for initial testing, as many inmates have a short length of

incarceration or may already be immune, and 3) continue to make the program a part of the ongoing disease screening process to increase the number of inmates who received services through this program.