

Hepatitis C incidence among First Nations in Alberta

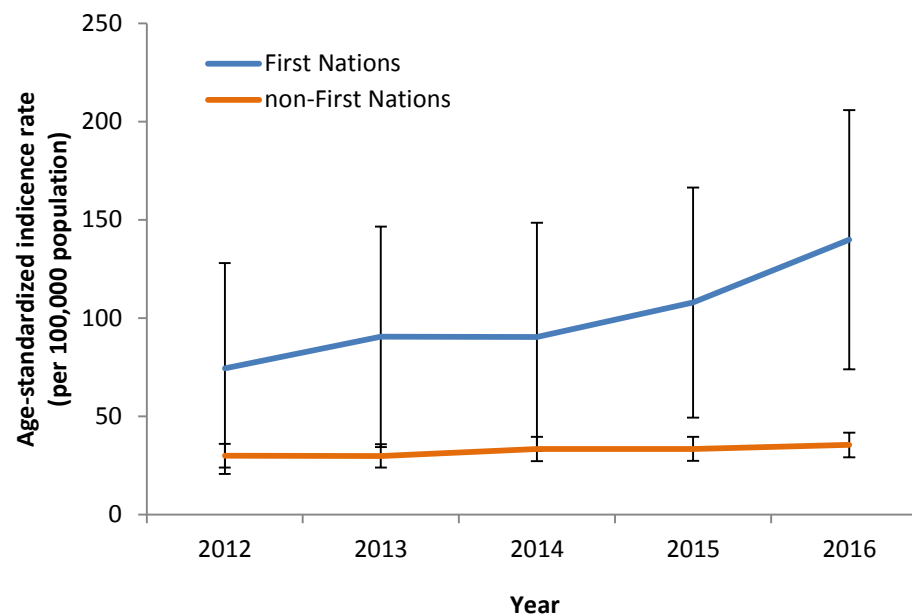
Age-standardized incidence rates of hepatitis C by First Nations status, Alberta, 2012-2016

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus.¹ Hepatitis C virus is a bloodborne virus that is transmitted most commonly through small quantities of blood which may occur, for example, through injection drug use.¹ People living with chronic infection may develop serious diseases such as cirrhosis or liver cancer. In today's *First Nations – Health Trends Alberta*,² we present age-standardized incidence rates of hepatitis C for First Nations and non-First Nations in Alberta between 2012 and 2016.

Rates of hepatitis C are increasing over time among First Nations; rates were four times higher than non-First Nations in 2016

In Alberta between 2012 and 2016, there was an annual average of around 1,410 new cases of hepatitis C (150 among First Nations and 1,260 among non-First Nations). Among First Nations, the number of new cases was comparable between males and females (annual average of 75 cases for both sexes); however, for non-First Nations, more cases were diagnosed among men (65 percent of total).

The average age-standardized hepatitis C incidence rate among First Nations over this time period was three times higher than the rate for non-First Nations (101.0 versus 32.5 per 100,000 population, respectively). This disparity increased over time: while incidence rates remained stable among non-First Nations, incidence rates among First Nations increased from 74.4 to 139.9 per 100,000 population between 2012 and 2016.



Increasing rates among First Nations could be explained by differential screening practices across populations and over time: if more people are getting tested, more cases of hepatitis C could be detected. Hepatitis C is treatable: antiviral medication can cure more than 95% of people infected, reducing risk of cirrhosis and liver cancer.¹ Current treatment is primarily oral, short duration, with minimal side effects. While treatment is an option, reducing risk of exposure to the virus through prevention practices such as harm reduction strategies is ideal.

¹ World Health Organization. Hepatitis C. (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs164/en/>).

² This is the 23rd in a series of First Nations-specific Health Trends compiled in collaboration by Alberta Health and the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre (AFNIGC). To suggest future topics, please contact the AFNIGC (communications@afnigc.ca; 403-539-5775).