

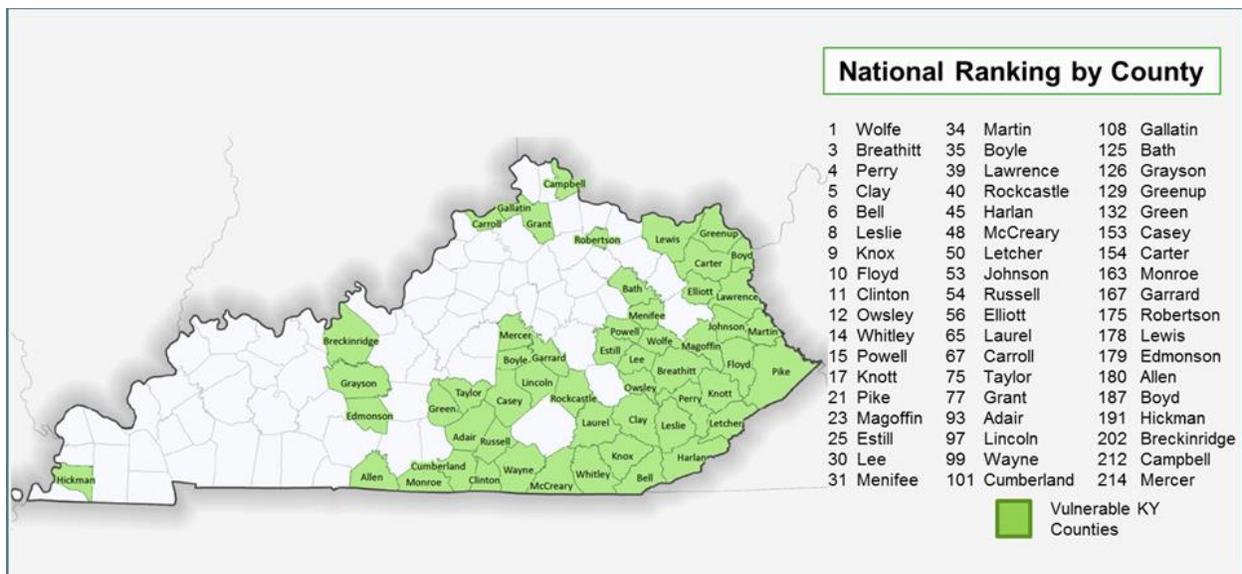
SOAR, KY Dept. for Public Health Host World Hepatitis Day Town Hall



Pikeville, Ky. (July 13, 2016) – Together, the Kentucky Department for Public Health and Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) will host national, state and local experts on Hepatitis C, infectious disease, and substance abuse at the Hazard Community & Technical College on July 28—World Hepatitis Day.

The meeting aims to increase community awareness, provide best practices on prevention, detection and treatment of Hepatitis C, HIV and substance abuse and engage multi-sector community, state and national stakeholders to organize resources and enhance engagement.

Kentucky leads the nation in the number of Hepatitis C infections. In 2014, there were over 100,000 people with known Hepatitis C infection living in Kentucky. Earlier this year, the CDC released a map that ranks counties throughout the U.S. on their risk of a rapid spread of HIV/Hepatitis infection among people who inject drugs and Kentucky holds 54 of the 220 most vulnerable counties. Of SOAR’s 54 Appalachian Kentucky counties, 44 made the list, with eight of the top 10 overall counties coming from the SOAR region.



(Source: <http://www.kyforward.com/study-says-intravenous-drug-users-in-almost-half-of-states-counties-at-high-risk-of-getting-hepatitis-c-hiv/>)

Hepatitis and associated risk of intravenous drug use and risky behavior can have an impact on society that span decades.

“Hepatitis C is a huge threat to the health of the people in Kentucky,” said Dr. William Hacker, SOAR Community Health and Wellness Advisory Chair. “Many are not aware of the long term effects that this epidemic will have on individuals and communities.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention, **Hepatitis C** is a liver infection caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus. Today, most people become infected with the Hepatitis C virus by sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs. For some people, Hepatitis C is a short-term illness, but for 70 to 85 percent of people who become infected with Hepatitis C, it becomes a long-term, chronic infection.

Chronic Hepatitis C is a serious disease than can result in long-term health problems, even death. The majority of infected persons might not be aware of their infection because they are not clinically ill. There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C. The best way to prevent Hepatitis C is by avoiding behaviors that can spread the disease, especially injecting drugs.

Hepatitis C ranks above Hepatitis A and B for number of deaths and highest mortality rate at 5.0 deaths per 100,000 population in 2014 according the Center for Disease Control’s *2014 Surveillance for Viral Hepatitis* report.

“As we turn our attention to the needs of those living with Hepatitis C and to the conditions which support becoming infected with the disease, it is vitality important that our communities become part of the solution,” said Dr. Ardis Hoven, Infectious Disease Specialist for the Kentucky Department for Public Health. “We have seen significant efforts in addressing these needs by engaging our partners in the community and we will continue to expand our efforts not only in diagnosing the problem but also in providing the tools to affect change. This Town Hall Meeting allows all to be involved in learning and understanding what the problem is and what we must do to resolve it.”



Dr. John Ward, CDC Director of the Division of Viral Hepatitis will attend to hear the response from communities in Eastern Kentucky and to weigh in on best practice recommendations and resources that can help strengthen community responses.

In addition to dynamic panelists, the true spotlight will be on addressing the concerns and needs of communities throughout the region. Attendees can expect a variety of informational and project booths, access to a risk assessment screening process to determine the need for additional testing or vaccination against Hepatitis A and B and breakout sessions that both dig deeper into the scope of the problem and focus on innovative solutions.

SOAR Executive Director Jared Arnett is pleased to partner with the Department of Health to offer this public meeting in Eastern Kentucky.

“We are very excited to be able to bring national experts to our region, while focusing on building the capacity and resources available to communities to be able to respond to this health crisis,” said Arnett.

The Hepatitis C Town Hall Meeting is open to the public and anyone interested in joining the discussion to halt intravenous drug use and substance abuse in the region is invited to attend or apply to showcase their solutions to this epidemic. To learn how you can be a part of World Hepatitis Day and to register today visit: <http://www.soar-ky.org/townhall>

Space is limited, so register today! Special thanks to our sponsors! Lunch is provided by Community Trust Bank. Appalachian Regional Hospitals will provide refreshments during the morning break. Highlands Regional Hospital is providing dessert during a breakout session.



Kentucky Public Health

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

SOAR is a network of Kentucky's Appalachian region that unites 54 counties worth of talent, enabling local people to shape a more innovative and diverse future with new opportunities and solutions for the next generation.

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