

NY hospital warns of possible hepatitis exposures

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(AP) -- A hospital in New York state is notifying about 2,800 patients of possible exposure to hepatitis C after learning that a former employee is suspected of exposing nearly 6,000 patients in Colorado to the disease.

The New York State Health Department said Wednesday that it's working with Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco after learning that Kristen Diane Parker, 26, worked there between Oct. 8, 2007, Feb. 28, 2008. The agency is recommending that patients who had surgery then should be tested.

Colorado health officials believe Parker, who is facing federal charges, may have exposed patients to [hepatitis+c/" rel="tag" class="textTag">hepatitis C](#) while working as a surgery technician at Denver's Rose Medical Center and Audubon Ambulatory Surgery Center in Colorado Springs. She's accused of injecting herself with painkillers meant for patients, then filling the used syringes with saline solution, even though she knew she was infected.

Ten cases of hepatitis C have been linked to Rose Medical Center, where Parker worked until April. Health officials are conducting tests to determine if the cases are definitively linked to her.

Parker was arrested earlier this month and faces federal charges of tampering with a consumer product, creating a counterfeit controlled substance, and obtaining a controlled substance by deception or subterfuge. She is being held without bond. Her next court hearing is

Oct. 6.

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne disease that can cause serious [liver](#) problems, including cirrhosis or [liver cancer](#). The illness is treatable, but there is no cure.

Rose Medical officials said Parker was advised that she tested positive for hepatitis C before starting her job there. She has said hospital officials didn't make it clear she tested positive.

People with hepatitis C are not barred from working in health services, so long as standard precautions are taken, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control.

Thousands of former surgery patients have contacted Denver's Rose Medical Center and Audubon Ambulatory Surgery Center in Colorado Springs for free blood tests being offered by both facilities.

Parker went to work for the Audubon surgery center in Colorado Springs shortly after being fired by Rose. She worked there from May 4.

Claire Pospisil of the New York State Department of Health said it's not known whether Parker had hepatitis C while working at Northern Westchester Hospital.

"The State Health Department is working closely with the hospital to ensure that any patients who underwent surgery at the hospital while Parker worked there are contacted and offered free testing," Pospisil told KMGH-TV in Denver.

The [hospital](#) has set up a patient help line at 914-666-1902 for information.

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