

# Indiana HIV outbreak, hepatitis C epidemic sparks US alert

April 24 2015, byJeni O'malley

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Federal health officials helping to contain an HIV outbreak in Indiana state issued an alert to health departments across the U.S. on Friday, urging them to take steps to identify and track HIV and hepatitis C cases in an effort to prevent similar outbreaks elsewhere.

A county in this Midwestern state is experiencing nearly daily increases in new HIV infections tied to intravenous drug use, and [health officials](#) hope the situation prompts other [states](#) to closely track their [hepatitis C](#) and HIV rates to identify potential clusters of disease.

Indiana state health officials said Friday that the number of positive HIV tests has jumped to 142 in 2015 in Scott County. That number includes 136 confirmed cases and 6 preliminary positives.

The county saw just three new HIV cases between 2009 and 2013.

Dr. Joan Duwve, chief medical consultant for the Indiana State Department of Health, said four out of five people infected in the outbreak have acknowledged using injectable drugs, mostly the painkiller Opana.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a federal agency, recorded a 150 percent increase in acute hepatitis C cases from 2010 to 2013, said Dr. Jonathan Mermin, director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention. Health officials say high rates of hepatitis C are a key indicator of needle-sharing and a

potential HIV outbreak.

The CDC advisory urges [health departments](#) to review recent data on HIV and hepatitis C diagnoses, overdose deaths, drug arrests and admissions for drug treatment to identify communities at risk for unrecognized clusters of HIV and hepatitis C infections.

Indiana typically sees about 500 new HIV cases a year, health officials have said. The Scott County outbreak is just the "tip of the iceberg" of a national opiate abuse problem that puts people at high risk of infectious diseases, Mermin said.

Dr. Jerome Adams, the state's health commissioner, said the state has spent more than \$2 million on efforts to fight the outbreak, which include testing, awareness campaigns, a limited needle-exchange program and an outreach center that allows people to sign up for health insurance and other services.

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