

Costly Infectious Diseases Burden Prison Health Care and Threaten Public Health

Corrections Professional reports that last October, state officials announced that New Jersey would pay for testing, monitoring, and treatment of Hepatitis C. The announcement came after the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that infected inmates were not receiving necessary treatments. More than 1,000 inmates in New Jersey's correctional system are infected.

The article indicated that several states do not treat inmates infected with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV), and that infection among inmates has also reached near-epidemic levels in Georgia, Ohio, and Maryland.

"Nationally, 20 percent to 30 percent of prisoners are infected with the blood-borne virus."

Source: "Case Closely Watched," *Corrections Professional* 8(6): December 16, 2002.

In another story, "the family of a burglar who died in Washington state prison" due to poor prison health care was awarded a one million dollar judgment against the prison. The inmate suffered from Hepatitis C. He was hospitalized only after a correctional officer complained to his supervisor about the inmate's condition. By that time, it was too late.

Source: "DOCS Begin to Reform Policies for Inmate Hepatitis C Care," *Corrections Professional*, 8(6), December 16, 2002.

Also related in *Corrections Professional*, is the *Associated Press* report of the discovery that a number of people were exposed to Tuberculosis in Kansas's correctional system, requiring testing of more than 150 people. The reason for the large number tested is that "the infected inmate had been housed in several county jails." Tests revealed that 27 of the people who were known to be exposed were infected, but none were contagious. Necessary treatments are in progress.

Source: "Prisoner's TB Prompts Testing among Inmates," *Correctional Professional* 8(6): December 16, 2002.

Both of these reports suggest the need for disease screening and treatment to protect the public health. The status of inmates is not static. They move between institutions and change from inmates to private citizens.

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