

Hepatitis C may increase pancreatic cancer risk

January 13 2009

A new study shows that infection with hepatitis C virus (HCV) increases a person's risk for a highly fatal cancer of the biliary tree, the bile carrying pathway between the liver and pancreas. This finding is in the January issue of *Hepatology*, a journal published by John Wiley & Sons on behalf of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD).

More than 4 million Americans are infected with HCV, which causes chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis and liver cancer. However, the associations between the virus and other potentially-related cancers are less clear.

To better understand the associations between HCV and these cancers, researchers led by Hashem El-Serag of Baylor College of Medicine, conducted a retrospective cohort study of more than 718,000 U.S. veterans who were treated at Veterans Affairs medical facilities between October 1, 1988 and September 30, 2004. Among them, 146,394 were infected with HCV and 572,293 were not. Uninfected subjects were matched to infected ones by sex, age and type and date of visit.

The researchers followed the subjects for an average of 2.3 years to determine the incidence these cancers. They found that "risk for biliary tree cancer in the HCV-infected cohort, although low (4 per 100,000 person-years), was more than double that in the HCV-uninfected cohort."

The study is the first to formally examine the association between HCV

and pancreatic cancer. It is also the first time a significant association has been detected between HCV and this type of cancer in a large cohort study. The findings may lead to greater examination of rare malignancies.

Article: "Risk of Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Cancers Following Hepatitis C Virus Infection: A Population-based Study of U.S. Veterans." El-Serag, Hashem; Engels, Eric; Landgren, Ola; Henderson, Louise; Chiao, Elizabeth; Amaratunge, Harshinie; Giordano, Thomas. *Hepatology* ; January 2009.

Source: Wiley

Citation: Hepatitis C may increase pancreatic cancer risk (2009, January 13) retrieved 18 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-01-hepatitis-pancreatic-cancer.html>

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