Another Hepatitis Case Linked To Colorado Hospital

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DENVER (AP) — Another hepatitis C case has been linked to a Denver hospital where an infected surgery technician was accused of swapping her dirty syringes for ones filled with a powerful painkiller meant for patients.

Colorado health officials said Friday that 11 former Rose Medical Center patients have tested positive for hepatitis C. They received treatment at the hospital while 26-year-old Kristen Diane Parker worked from October to April.

More testing is needed to determine if the infections came from Parker, who is jailed without bond on federal tampering and drug-related charges.

Investigations are also under way at hospitals in New York and Texas, where Parker also worked. No likely cases have been reported in those other states.

Parker also worked at Audubon Surgery Center in Colorado Springs from May until her arrest in June. Some 900 former surgery patients at Audubon have been tested, but so far no hepatitis cases there have been linked to Parker. Nearly 550 Audubon patients have tested negative, but state health officials said it may take up to seven weeks for the infection to show up in the bloodstream.

As of Friday, 3,057 Rose patients have been tested, hospital spokeswoman Leslie Teegarden said. Not all results have been released, but the state health department said 1,250 former Rose patients have tested negative for the blood-born disease.

Hepatitis C can cause serious liver problems, including cirrhosis or liver cancer. The illness is treatable, but there is no cure.

Parker is accused of taking syringes meant for patients off operating room carts and replacing them with used syringes filled with saline solution. The syringes she is accused of stealing were filled with fentanyl, a narcotic painkiller 80 to 100 times stronger than morphine.

New York health officials said there's evidence that Parker did the same thing while at Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, N.Y., when she worked there between Oct. 8, 2007, and Feb. 28, 2008. Some 2,800 former patients have been advised to get tested.

In Texas, officials launched an investigation Wednesday into whether Parker exposed patients when she worked at Christus St. John Hospital outside Houston

between May 2005 and October 2006. Authorities and hospital officials didn't have a count of how many patients underwent surgery at Christus St. John Hospital while Parker worked there.

Texas, like most states, tracks all cases of hepatitis C to prevent massive outbreaks. Harris County, Texas, health department spokeswoman Rita Obey said Friday officials did not detect an unusual outbreak around the time Parker worked there.

"It is something that we would have noticed," Obey said. "We really haven't heard anything along those lines."

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