

**TITLE:** HEPATITIS C VIRUS INFECTION USING THE RAPID TEST IN SUGARCANE CUTTERS IN GOIÁS AND PARAÍBA, BRAZIL

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**ABSTRACT:**

Infection with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a major public health problem and it is estimated that 170 million people worldwide are chronically infected with this virus. Chronic infection affects 60-85% of the cases, of these, 20% can progress to cirrhosis and 1 to 5% progress to hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). Transmission of HCV occurs mainly via the parenteral route, and thus, sugarcane cutters may present an increased risk of acquiring this infection due to the constant accidents that occur during the handling of cutting tools used for cutting the sugarcane. This is the first study in Brazil that aimed to estimate the prevalence of HCV infection in sugarcane cutters from Goiás and Paraíba using the rapid test. Rapid tests can be performed on hard-to-reach populations because of their easy-to-perform and easy-to-interpreted characteristic, and it is also able to be used in places with the minimum infrastructure and without the need for expensive or complex equipment. The study population consisted of 956 sugarcane cutters located in Goiás (n = 655) and João Pessoa-Paraíba (n = 301). All participants who signed an informed written consent were interviewed and then subjected to the rapid test (Alere - Bioeasy) for detection of HCV specific antibody (anti - HCV) according to the manufacturer's recommendations. The data were analyzed in the statistical program SPSS version 17.0 for Windows. The study population consisted of 98.8% of male individuals, 44.4% of the participants self-report their skin color as brown or mixed (*pardo*), and the majority (76.7%) was married. The prevalence of hepatitis C virus infection in sugarcane cutters was 0.83% (95% CI: 0.36 - 1.64). Despite the low endemicity of this infection in the sugarcane cutters studied, it is important to know the health of this population, which is often neglected. Epidemiological studies may contribute to guide preventive and interventionist health policies in this population.

**Keywords:** hepatitis C, rapid test, sugarcane cutters

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