Among people with hepatitis C virus (HCV), Latinos have a higher risk of developing cirrhosis or liver cancer while African Americans have a lower risk, when compared with whites. These differences hold true even when controlling for various other factors, such as HIV status, hep C genotype, obesity, diabetes and whether or not people have been treated for hep C.

Publishing their findings in The American Journal of Gastroenterology, researchers combed the Veterans Administration HCV Clinical Case Registry for people who were confirmed to have hep C between 2000 and 2009 and who had at least one year of follow-up with the VA. The researchers also identified cases of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC, the most common form of liver cancer) and cirrhosis among the registry through early 2010.

Out of 149,407 people with hep C, 56.3 percent were white (technically described as “non-Hispanic white”), 36.1 percent were African American, 6.0 percent were Latino, and 1.6 percent were other races. Throughout an average 5.2 years of follow-up, 13,099 members of this population were diagnosed with cirrhosis and 3,551 developed liver cancer. The respective incidence rates of cirrhosis and liver cancer among the three main racial groups were as follows: Latinos had rates of 28.8 and 7.8 per 100 person-years; whites had rates of 21.6 and 4.7 per 100 person-years; and African Americans had rates of 13.3 and 3.9 per 100 person-years.

After adjusting for various factors, the researchers found that, when compared with whites, Latinos had a 28 percent greater risk of cirrhosis and a 61 percent greater risk of liver cancer. Meanwhile, African Americans had a 42 percent reduced risk of cirrhosis and a 23 percent reduced risk of liver cancer when compared with whites.

To read the study abstract, click here.