

Health Unit Media Release

July 22, 2011



July 28, 2011 is World Hepatitis Day

It's everywhere, all across the world. It's in every rural town, city and every country. 1 in 12 people worldwide are living with hepatitis B or C – including 600,000 people in Canada. The problem is many don't even know it.

The World Hepatitis Alliance represents 280 hepatitis B and hepatitis C patient groups from around the world and is a global voice for the 500 million people worldwide living with chronic viral hepatitis B or C. This Alliance coordinates World Hepatitis Day.

The theme this year is **“This is hepatitis..... Know it. Confront it. Hepatitis affects everyone, everywhere.”**

- Hepatitis B and C are two different viruses, which can both cause inflammation of the liver.
- They are known as ‘silent’ viruses, and because many people feel no symptoms, you could be infected for years without knowing it. If left untreated, both the hepatitis B and C viruses can lead to liver scarring which is known as cirrhosis and can be life threatening.
- Hepatitis B is more infectious than hepatitis C and can also be spread through saliva, semen and vaginal fluid.
- You cannot get infected with hepatitis B or C through everyday contact such as shaking hands, coughing or sneezing, or by using the same toilet.
- While there is a vaccine that protects against hepatitis B infection, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

What you can do...

- Get immunized against hepatitis B if you are at increased risk of getting infected.
- Talk to your health care provider about getting tested for hepatitis B and C if you are at risk. Treatment can cure hepatitis C. It can also control the hepatitis B virus so that further damage to your liver is prevented.
- Avoid sharing needles or any drug-related equipment with an infected person. Both viruses can be contracted through blood-to-blood contact.
- Use safe sex practices including the use of condoms. Hepatitis B infection can occur through having unprotected sex with an infected person. This form of transmission is rare for hepatitis C.
- Have a healthy lifestyle to protect your liver. Try to avoid excessive alcohol use, stop smoking, eat a low fat diet with enough fruit and vegetables, and reduce your weight if necessary.

Call Leeds Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit and speak to a Public Health Nurse on the Communicable Disease Team if you have questions, or check out our website at www.healthunit.org and the World Hepatitis Alliance website at www.worldhepatitisalliance.org. If you don't have access to a computer, call the Health ACTION Line at 1-800-660-5853 or 613-345-5685.

-30-

Contact: Susan Healey, Communications Co-ordinator, 613-345-5685 or 1-800-660-5853 or cell number 613-802-0550