

# 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](http://www.healthunit.org) and the World Hepatitis Alliance website at [www.worldhepatitisalliance.org](http://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.

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