



PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

May is National Hepatitis Awareness Month

Public encouraged to review immunization records
and learn about risk factors for the disease

LAS VEGAS – May 4, 2007 – May is national Hepatitis Awareness Month. One in 10 Americans is affected by liver disease, including men, women and children of every race and age group. The health district encourages everyone to review their immunization status, and learn more about the risk factors, treatment and prevention of viral hepatitis.

The most common forms of viral hepatitis include hepatitis A, B and C. Hepatitis A is most often transmitted by ingesting food or water that has been contaminated with the feces of an infected person. Those most at risk are children in communities with high levels of hepatitis A, travelers to high-risk geographic areas and men who have sex with men. To help prevent hepatitis A transmission, parents and care givers should always wash their hands thoroughly after changing diapers, and children should be taught to wash their hands with soap and warm water after using the restroom.

Hepatitis B and C are blood borne diseases transmitted when blood or body fluids from an infected person enter the body of a susceptible person. The disease is most-frequently transmitted through injection drug use with a common needle and through sexual activity. Both hepatitis B and C can cause chronic infection which may lead to development of cirrhosis of the liver and/or liver cancer. Some people infected with hepatitis C initially may not have any symptoms, and may not know they have been infected. People in the following risk groups should be tested for hepatitis C:

- Anyone ever notified of receiving blood from a donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C;
- Anyone who has ever injected illegal drugs, even if it was only a few times years ago;
- Anyone who received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before July, 1992;
- Anyone who received blood clotting products made before 1987;
- Anyone who has ever been on long-term kidney dialysis ;
- Anyone with evidence of liver disease (e.g., elevated liver enzymes).

It is possible to prevent hepatitis A and B by getting vaccinated. As of 1999, all food handlers in Clark County are required to be immunized for hepatitis A. There is no vaccine to prevent infection from hepatitis C. Awareness, counseling, testing and educational campaigns help prevent further spread of this illness.

(more)

In Clark County, 7 cases of hepatitis A , 35 cases of acute hepatitis B, 547 reports of chronic hepatitis B and 3 cases of acute hepatitis C were reported in 2006. Additionally we received 1,315 reports of persons who have been exposed to hepatitis C but are not considered "acute" or new infections. These reports are designated as "past/present hepatitis C". Please note: the case counts represent only illness reported to the health district - the actual amount of illness in the community, including among people who have not developed symptoms, may vary. For more information about hepatitis A, B and C, the public may visit the health district website at <http://www.SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict.org>.

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