



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 27, 2008

Health District reports increase in positive lab results of hepatitis C

LAS VEGAS – The Southern Nevada Health District is reporting an increase in positive laboratory reports of hepatitis C. Typically the health district receives 20 to 40 positive reports daily. Recently the daily report totals have exceeded 150. These higher numbers were expected based on increased rates of testing and the background rate for the disease.

The health district has finalized a survey tool for interviewing patients and will begin contacting patients this week. Patients who had procedures requiring injected anesthesia at the center in January will have to wait six months from their procedure date to be tested and therefore the interview process will take several months to complete.

Considerations of the investigation include:

- The patient list received by the health district was incomplete and part of the interview process will include identifying patients who had procedures at the endoscopy center.
- Approximately 4 percent of the clinic population would have been previously infected with hepatitis C and laboratory testing cannot distinguish between recent and older infections.
- Because many of the newly reported infections may have been acquired years previously it may not be possible to determine the source of the infection.
- The evaluation of acute hepatitis C infections involves examining a patient's risk for six months prior to the onset of symptoms. The evaluation of chronic hepatitis C infections involves examining a patient's risk over the course of their lives.
- The health district routinely investigate acute hepatitis B and HIV cases, however, the risk of acquiring either of these two infections is thought to be much lower for persons possibly exposed at the clinic.
- A set of criteria is being developed for evaluation of risk factors in order to classify cases based on their likelihood of exposure at the clinic.

As the health district begins to compile results from the interview process reports will be available and posted to the website at www.SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict.org.