



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

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**DOH OFFERS FREE HEPATITIS B AND C SCREENINGS
ON WORLD HEPATITIS DAY – MAY 19**

HONOLULU – Tuesday, May 19, 2009 is World Hepatitis Day in Hawai'i. The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) is joining others across the nation and world to help raise awareness and support for improvements in prevention, diagnosis and treatment for people living with chronic viral hepatitis B and C.

DOH health centers and other community-based sites are offering free screenings to the public on Tuesday, May 19 to encourage people to find out their hepatitis B and C status. Individuals can call Aloha United Way 211 to find the free screening location nearest them (flyer attached).

"Often called the silent epidemic, most people with hepatitis B or C don't have symptoms for many years," stated Heather Lusk, DOH hepatitis C coordinator. "People with hepatitis B and C shouldn't wait until they feel sick to be tested because there are many things, including treatment, they can do to take care of themselves before they become ill. The earlier people know they have hepatitis, the better the outcome."

According to DOH Immunization Branch estimates, 1 percent to 3 percent of people in Hawai'i have hepatitis B, and approximately 23,000 are living with hepatitis C. Hepatitis B and C are the most common known causes of liver cancer in Hawai'i, and Hawaii has the highest rate of liver cancer in the U.S.

(more)

“Many people with hepatitis B and C get liver damage or cirrhosis from the disease, which can be minimized by making healthy choices such as not drinking alcohol,” said Lusk.

Hepatitis B and C are spread through contact with blood and body fluids. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that anyone who has been exposed to blood through needle use, blood transfusion, non-sterile equipment or tattooing should be tested for both hepatitis B and C. Anyone born in a country with high rates of hepatitis B, such as countries in Asia and the Pacific, should be screened for hepatitis B. Hepatitis B is easily spread from mother to child through contact with blood and other body fluids. Infants born to mothers who have hepatitis B infection warrant special treatment at birth.

More information on hepatitis B and C is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis, or by calling 1-888-443-7232. For more information about World Hepatitis Day, go to www.aminumber12.org.

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