

# Department of Public Health

**May 2009**

## **May 19th is Hepatitis Awareness Day: More than 30 million Americans Affected by this Silent Disease**

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**Hartford** — The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) and many of its partners including the Connecticut Division of the American Liver Foundation (ALF) are asking the public to be aware of Hepatitis and the steps they can take to reduce the spread of this disease.

“Liver disease is a serious public health issue in our nation, as it currently affects more than 30 million Americans. Diseases such as Hepatitis are often referred to as “silent diseases” because liver damage can gradually occur over many years before being discovered, which often happens once the damage is irreparable,” stated DPH Commissioner Dr. J. Robert Galvin.

“Nationally, hepatitis B and C are major causes of liver cancer, liver transplantation and even death.”

Hepatitis does not discriminate and affects all ages, genders, races, ethnicities and income levels. Learning about liver wellness, hepatitis A and B vaccination (there is no vaccine for hepatitis C), and risk factors are important ways to recognize and prevent the spread of these diseases.

Dr. Galvin added that “hepatitis A and B are vaccine preventable diseases, yet they continue to be the most commonly reported vaccine preventable diseases. Getting vaccinated, especially if you are at high risk, provides the best protection from these diseases.”

Connecticut mandates that all newborns, infants and school-age children be vaccinated against hepatitis B. All pregnant women should be tested for hepatitis B during their prenatal care so that measures can be taken to prevent transmission to newborns.

Hepatitis A is most often spread through ingesting contaminated food or water or by certain sexual practices and has been associated with large outbreaks of disease. Hepatitis B and C are spread through direct contact with infected blood, which can occur when sharing injection drug needles or paraphernalia, or through sexual activity. In addition, before 1992, hepatitis C could have been spread by receipt of an infected blood transfusion, blood products or a donated organ. Since 1992, hepatitis C screening and testing procedures have been in place to ensure a safer blood supply.

DPH and ALF are asking residents to increase their own understanding of the risks and causes

of hepatitis by educating themselves and their loved ones. The Connecticut Division of ALF offer patient support groups, physician referrals, educational seminars for patients, their families and medical professionals, and educational brochures and information.

Most people who are infected with hepatitis C do not have symptoms until liver damage is advanced. DPH recommends that if you think you may be at risk for hepatitis C talk to your doctor about getting tested. To learn more about hepatitis A, B, and C, visit the DPH website at [www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph) and click “Programs and Services,” then “hepatitis,” or the Connecticut Division of the ALF at [www.liverfoundation.org/chapters/ctalf](http://www.liverfoundation.org/chapters/ctalf)

***The American Liver Foundation’s mission is to facilitate, advocate and promote education, support and research for the prevention, treatment and cure of liver disease. To learn more about the ALF, please visit its website at [www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org) or call (203) 234-2022.***

*The Connecticut Department of Public Health is the state’s leader in public health policy and advocacy with a mission to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of our state. To contact the department, please visit its website at [www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph) or call (860) 509-7270.*

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