



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**News Release**

**LINDA LINGLE**  
GOVERNOR

---

CHIYOME LEINAALA FUKINO M.D.  
DIRECTOR  
Phone: (808) 586-4410  
Fax: (808) 586-4444

---

For Immediate Release: May 26, 2005

05-37

**PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST VIRAL HEPATITIS**

HONOLULU - In recognition of National Hepatitis Awareness Month, the Hawaii Department of Health is encouraging Hawaii residents to learn more about hepatitis and what they can do to prevent it.

In Hawaii an estimated 1 – 3% of the population (12,000 – 37,000 people) is living with chronic hepatitis B and an estimated 1.8% of the population (23,000 people) is living with chronic hepatitis C. Nationwide, nearly 1.25 million people have hepatitis B and nearly 4 million Americans are believed to have been infected with hepatitis C. Most don't even know they are infected with a potentially deadly liver disease.

People with chronic hepatitis B or C may not feel sick and may not know they have had it for many years. People are encouraged to talk with their doctor to see if they have a risk for getting viral hepatitis.

Hepatitis B and C are spread by direct contact with blood, and hepatitis B is also spread through sexual contact (hepatitis C is rarely spread through sex).

"Hepatitis tends to be a silent epidemic. Increased awareness and prevention can potentially save many lives in Hawaii and millions of dollars in health care costs," said Peter Whiticar, Chief of the STD/AIDS Prevention Branch which supports the efforts.

Hepatitis is a liver disease and can be caused by alcohol and other toxins, but is most often caused by viruses, particularly hepatitis A, B and C viruses. Hepatitis can cause liver scarring (known as cirrhosis) or other moderate to severe liver damage, leading to liver transplant or even death.

Vaccines are available to protect against hepatitis A and B, but there is no vaccine against hepatitis C. In Hawaii, children are required to be vaccinated against hepatitis B before entering Hawaii schools (call the

Department of Health Immunization Program at 808-586-8313 for more information). Adults with certain risk factors should also be immunized against hepatitis A and/or B. Because there is no vaccine for hepatitis C individuals potentially at risk should be screened for hepatitis C. Individuals should discuss hepatitis vaccination or screening with their health care provider.

The Hawaii Department of Health offers hepatitis vaccination and screening services statewide for people at-risk for and living with viral hepatitis that aren't able to get them otherwise. For more information about local hepatitis resources, call Aloha United Way at 211.

###

For more information, contact:  
Peter Whiticar  
STD/AIDS Prevention Services Branch  
Department of Health  
Phone: (808) 733-9010

## HEPATITIS FACT SHEET

### HEPATITIS A

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:** jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, diarrhea and/or fever.

**PERSONS AT RISK:** Household contacts of infected persons, sex contacts of infected persons, persons traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common, men who have sex with men, injecting and non-injecting drug users

**PREVENTION:** Hepatitis A vaccine is the best protection. Short-term protection against hepatitis A is available from immune globulin. It can be given before and within 2 weeks after coming in contact with HAV. \*\*Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before preparing and eating food.

### HEPATITIS B

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:** [About 30% of persons have no signs or symptoms. Signs and symptoms are less common in children than adults.] Jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, diarrhea and/or fever

**PERSONS AT RISK:** Persons with multiple sex partners or diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease, men who have sex with men, sex contacts of infected persons, injection drug users, household contacts of chronically infected persons, Infants born to infected mothers, healthcare and safety workers and Hemodialysis patients.

**PREVENTION:** Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection. Use latex condoms when having sexual intercourse, if pregnant, get a blood test for hepatitis B, do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes). If you have or had hepatitis B, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue. If you are a health care or public safety worker, get vaccinated against hepatitis B, and always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.

### HEPATITIS C

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:** [About 80% of persons have no signs or symptoms.] Jaundice, fatigue, dark urine, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea

**PERSONS AT RISK:** Persons with multiple sex partners or diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease, men who have sex with men, sex contacts of infected persons, injection drug users, household contacts of chronically infected persons, Infants born to infected mothers, healthcare and safety workers and Hemodialysis patients.

**PREVENTION:** There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C. Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes), do not share needles or use injected drugs, healthcare and safety workers. HCV can be spread by sex, but this is rare, use latex condoms. If you are HCV positive, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.