



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR

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WORLD HEPATITIS DAY, JULY 28, 2014

**HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH URGES
SCREENINGS FOR HIV AND HEPATITIS B AND C**

HONOLULU – Viral hepatitis is the leading cause of liver cancer, which is the second largest form of cancer that leads to deaths. Worldwide, viral hepatitis kills 1.5 million people each year.

Many immigrants to Hawaii who were born in Asia and the Pacific Islands (excluding Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii), where hepatitis B is common, are especially vulnerable. Unfortunately, many may not recognize the signs or symptoms of hepatitis.

The good news: viral hepatitis can be prevented and those with disease can be treated. More good news: most insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid, cover the entire costs of one-time tests for the disease.

World Hepatitis Day

The Hawaii Department of Health is drawing attention to this health issue and the importance of screenings for early detection as part of World Hepatitis Day on July 28, 2014. World Hepatitis Day on July 28, 2014. This day has also been designated Hawaii Hepatitis Day by Governor Neil Abercrombie's Office.

“We’re urging Hawaii’s healthcare providers to screen their patients and encouraging Hawaii residents to request screenings because many people with HIV and most people with hepatitis B or C don’t know that they have been infected,” said Peter Whiticar, chief of the STD AIDS Prevention Branch in the Hawaii Department of Health.

“If undetected, these infections can lead to serious health complications, including liver cancer or even death. Today, more effective HIV and hepatitis treatments are available, and people have better options to take care

of themselves before they become ill. The earlier people know they have HIV or hepatitis, the better their health outcome.”

Aligned with National, Evidence-Based Recommendations

The Hawaii Department of Health’s urgent request aligns with recommendations by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which is an independent, volunteer panel of physicians in the fields of preventive medicine and primary care. This past May, the task force recommended a one-time screening for hepatitis B for anyone born in countries where hepatitis B is common, including most of Asia and the Pacific.

In addition to the hepatitis B screenings, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also recommends screenings for HIV for everyone 15 to 65 years of age as well as a one-time hepatitis C screening test for baby boomers born between 1945 and 1965.

It is important to note that these one-time screening test recommendations are for individuals without risk factors or evidence of infection. Patients with risk factors or medical evidence of infection should be tested more frequently.

Early Detection is Critical

“By identifying and treating these diseases early, we hope this improves patient and community health outcomes, especially since most persons at risk for HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C are not regularly screened,” Whiticar said.

“If your loved ones might be at risk, they can speak with their medical provider to discuss appropriate testing options. We also encourage medical providers to reach out to us to learn more about these recommendations. Providing these simple tests now can mean that they can have their patients avoid liver disease or even liver cancer later,” he said.

Insurance Coverage

Individuals with medical insurance can go to their primary care physician to request a test for HIV, hepatitis B and/or C. Individuals without insurance can call Aloha United Way 211 or go to www.hepfreehawaii.org to find the free HIV and hepatitis screening location nearest them. Not all sites will offer hepatitis B testing. Testing will be based on eligibility and availability at each site.

For more information about hepatitis resources and events in Hawaii, go to www.hepfreehawaii.org.

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About the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, formed in 1984, is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

The Task Force assigns each recommendation a letter grade (an A, B, C, or D grade or an I statement) based on the strength of the evidence and the balance of benefits and harms of a preventive service. The recommendations apply only to people who have no signs or symptoms of the specific disease or condition under evaluation, and the recommendations address only services offered in the primary care setting or services referred by a primary care clinician.

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