



NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Hoeven Proclaims *Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month* in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – Governor John Hoeven has proclaimed May as *Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month* in North Dakota.

“This observance provides an opportunity to encourage North Dakotans to learn more about the disease and to go in for testing if they are at risk for hepatitis,” said Sarah Weninger, Hepatitis Program coordinator for the Department of Health.

The following are the three most common types of viral hepatitis in the United States. All three can cause liver disease.

- Hepatitis A can last a few weeks to several months. The virus usually is spread when a person eats or drinks something contaminated with fecal matter of an infected person. The best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting vaccinated.
- Hepatitis B can cause a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness or even death. The virus usually is spread when blood or body fluid from a person infected with hepatitis B enters the body of someone who is not infected. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated.
- Hepatitis C usually lasts a lifetime and can result in long-term health problems or even death. The virus usually is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. Treatment options are available, but there is no vaccine for hepatitis C, so the best way to prevent it is to avoid behaviors that put you at risk.

Because most people who are infected with hepatitis have no symptoms, the Department of Health encourages those who have engaged in any of the following high-risk behaviors to consult with their health-care provider about being tested. Risk factors for hepatitis C include:

- Sharing needles, syringes or other drug equipment to inject drugs.
- Receiving blood products prior to 1992.
- Getting “home tattoos” or tattoos from unlicensed and unregulated tattoo shops.

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Risk factors for hepatitis B include:

- Having multiple sexual partners.
- Being born to an infected mother.
- Sharing needles, syringes or other drug equipment to inject drugs.

More than three million people in the United States have chronic hepatitis C virus infection, which is the major cause of chronic liver disease and the leading reason for liver transplantation. Additionally, one in 12 people worldwide are living with either chronic hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Since 2005, an average of three people test positive for hepatitis A, 65 for hepatitis B, and 548 for hepatitis C each year in North Dakota.

In North Dakota, the following sites offer vaccinations to protect against hepatitis A and B and free testing for hepatitis C:

- Bismarck/Burleigh Public Health, Bismarck
- Central Valley Health Unit, Jamestown
- Custer Health, Mandan
- Fargo Cass Public Health, Fargo
- First District Health Unit, Minot
- Grand Forks Public Health Department, Grand Forks
- Lake Region District Health, Devils Lake
- Minne Tohe Health Center, New Town
- Richland Country Health Department, Wahpeton
- Southwestern District Health Unit, Dickinson
- Upper Missouri District Health, Williston

For more information, call the North Dakota Department of Health's Viral Hepatitis Program at 701.328.2378 or 800.472.2180 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/disease.

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Please note: Proclamation follows.

Proclamation
VIRAL HEPATITIS AWARENESS MONTH
May 2010

WHEREAS, one in 12 people worldwide are living with either chronic hepatitis B or chronic hepatitis C; and

WHEREAS, because most of the 500 million people worldwide infected with hepatitis B or hepatitis C do not have any symptoms and are unaware of their infection, they may spread the virus to others without knowing; and

WHEREAS, viral hepatitis is the leading cause of liver cancer and the most common reason for liver transplants in the United States; and

WHEREAS, an estimated 1.2 million Americans are living with chronic hepatitis B; 22,000 pregnant women in the U.S. are infected with hepatitis B virus and can transmit the virus to their newborns; and

WHEREAS, 3.9 million Americans are living with chronic hepatitis C; 20 percent of individuals with chronic hepatitis C will develop cirrhosis; and

WHEREAS, chronic viral hepatitis contributes to 15,000 deaths in the United States each year; and

WHEREAS, it is important to recognize the worldwide occurrence of viral hepatitis and focus on prevention and detection strategies; and

WHEREAS, North Dakotans are encouraged to be knowledgeable about the risk factors of viral hepatitis, engage in viral hepatitis screening with their health-care provider, and lead a healthy lifestyle to prevent viral hepatitis infections.

NOW, THEREFORE, as the Governor of the State of North Dakota, I do hereby proclaim May 2010, VIRAL HEPATITIS AWARENESS MONTH in the State of North Dakota.

John Hoeven
Governor

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