

World Hepatitis Day 2020 28th July

July 28th is World hepatitis day which marks a day where we bring increased awareness to the global burden of viral hepatitis. 28th July is the birthday of Dr Blumberg who is a Nobel prize winner, discovered the hepatitis B virus, developed a diagnostic test and vaccine for the hepatitis B virus.

The theme for 2020 is “finding the missing millions”

Did you know.....: Common facts about hepatitis.

1. There are **5 viruses** that predominantly affect the liver. Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E. They are all different viruses and are transmitted through different pathways. Hepatitis A and E are mostly spread through faecal-oral route (hence preventable by hand hygiene and careful food preparation). Hepatitis B and C are spread through blood and body fluids. Hepatitis D only occurs in persons infected with hepatitis B.
2. There are over 300 million people in the world that live with viral hepatitis. **Less than 20%** are aware that they have the infection. The prevalence rates of hepatitis varies throughout the world, some areas have high rates of hepatitis B of over 10%.
3. More than **1.5 million persons die each year** from viral hepatitis. Many unaware of their diagnosis till the very late stages of disease, and often too late to be saved. Causes of death include acute liver failure, but the most common cause of death is liver cancer and liver failure. Described as a ‘silent killer’, those unaware of their status may only have symptoms when the disease is very advanced and when options of treatment are very limited. Know your status !
4. **Prevention of hepatitis** remains central in eliminating viral hepatitis as a significant burden of disease on a large scale for you personally. Vaccines are available for both hepatitis B and A. Hepatitis B vaccine is part of the childhood vaccination schedule, starting at birth. It is safe for all people to have at any age, even when pregnant. Know your status and get vaccinated if you are not protected. All people should be vaccinated. Those who are family members or partners of positive patients can access free vaccines through NSW health. Ask your doctor.
5. Hepatitis B and C are **transmitted** through blood and body fluids. Avoid sharing needles, razor blades and toothbrushes. It is safe to share meals, hug your family and friends. Stigma and discrimination is not acceptable. Talk to your health care provider if you have any concerns.
6. Hepatitis B, C and D can lead to chronic liver disease, cirrhosis and liver cancer. However, many can continue to have a healthy and normal life. It is imperative that you see your doctor regularly and get check ups. **Taking care of yourself** is also very important, in addition to getting vaccinated, avoid excess alcohol and do not smoke, take care not to take medications that can cause liver injury, focus on a healthy diet, exercise and stay lean.
7. Hepatitis B can be treated. **Treatment** is available in the form of a oral tablet for those who require treatment. Your doctor will assess whether you need treatment now or not based on blood tests, your history and other test results. Even if you do not need treatment, you may need treatment later. Life long check up is needed.
8. **Hepatitis C can be cured.** All persons with hepatitis C virus confirmed with PCR test is eligible for treatment. Tablets taken for 8-12 weeks can cure more than 95% of cases. Ask your doctor about this!!
9. If you have a medical condition that requires immune suppression, you may be at risk of **hepatitis B and C reactivation**- know your status and ask your doctor.

10. People with viral hepatitis can be at **increased risk of liver cancer**. Screening can lead to early detection and curative treatment. Liver cancer is the most common cause of death in patients with hepatitis B. It is asymptomatic and hence, the only way to diagnose it early is by screening. If you have hepatitis B, you may need screening. This is simple with ultrasound on a 6 monthly basis. It could save your life. High risk groups are older persons, those with advanced disease (cirrhosis) and a positive family history of liver cancer. Treatment is available.

You or someone close to you, loved ones can be impacted by hepatitis. Celebrate this day as a hepatitis community to increase awareness, talk about hepatitis and address the ongoing challenges of increasing prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Play your part in “finding the missing millions “. You could save a life.