

25 July 2016

Live Hep-free

With more than 17,000 people living with Hepatitis B and C in south western Sydney, health experts are encouraging people to get tested and treated this World Hepatitis Day (Thursday 28 July 2016).

Megan Brooks, SWSLHD Manager HIV & Related Programs, said testing and treatment were important steps on the road to elimination of viral hepatitis.

“Hepatitis B and C are the most serious forms of hepatitis that people should be tested for, as they can be effectively treated and managed,” said Ms Brooks.

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus and ninety per cent of new hepatitis C infections and 80 per cent of existing infections are due to transmission by sharing injecting equipment.

Hepatitis B is both a blood-borne and sexually transmissible infection. The main routes of transmission include from mother-to-child usually occurring at or around birth, during unprotected sex and through sharing of injecting equipment.

Unfortunately, many Australians have no idea they are living with these viruses as they usually do not cause any symptoms.

Approximately three-quarters of people in south western Sydney living with chronic hepatitis B were born in countries with high Hepatitis B prevalence including Vietnam, China, Cambodia, the Philippines and Fiji. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also have a higher prevalence.

Ms Brooks also said that if left unmanaged and untreated, people with chronic hepatitis B or C are at risk of developing progressive liver disease and in some cases, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

“Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver, caused when it is damaged by viruses, alcohol, drugs and other toxins or when the immune system breaks down.

“If you think you may have Hepatitis B or C ask your doctor for a blood test and find out.

“If you know you have Hepatitis B or C, or you’ve been told something is wrong with your liver, you can also ask your doctor treatment or a referral to a liver specialist (hepatologist),” she said.

Tips to help you love your liver:

- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B
- Protect yourself by practicing safer sex and don’t share toothbrushes, razors or other personal care items with others
- Take care with tattoos and piercings - make sure you use a professional business that has strict sterilisation practices.

For more information on hepatitis visit <https://www.hep.org.au/>