

The time to eliminate Hepatitis is now, says the KZN Department of Health

28 July 2017

Today, 28 July 2017, marks World Hepatitis Day. The Department of Health is calling on all South Africans to act now to prevent infections and death from viral hepatitis.

Viral hepatitis is a group of infectious disease known as hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E. This disease affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide, including those living in South Africa.

Viral hepatitis causes acute and chronic liver disease and killing close to over 1.5 million people every year, mostly from hepatitis B and C.

These infections can be prevented, but most people don't know how.

The Department of Health is calling for action to prevent, diagnose, and treat viral hepatitis.

During the World Hepatitis Day, public awareness events will take place around South Africa to promote hepatitis disease prevention.

Transmission

- Hepatitis A and E viruses are highly contagious and transmitted through contaminated food and water. They can also be spread by eating raw shellfish that have come from water contaminated by sewage.
- Hepatitis B and C viruses are transmitted through blood and other bodily fluids (i.e. saliva, semen and vaginal fluid) of an infected person and unsafe injectable drug use. These can also pass from mother to child during childbirth.
- Hepatitis D (delta) virus usually occurs with hepatitis B virus as a co-infection or super-infection.

Action

The Department of Health is urging everyone to take action to prevent hepatitis by:

- Vaccinating against hepatitis A and hepatitis B
- Using condoms
- Avoiding sharing of needles or items such as toothbrushes, razors or nail scissors with an infected person.
- Avoiding getting tattoos or body piercings from unlicensed facilities.
- Ensuring safe and rational use of injections. Injecting drug users are at increased risk of hepatitis B and C infections, largely because of unhygienic needle and syringe sharing practices.
- Practicing safe hygiene and sanitation in order to prevent infection with hepatitis A and hepatitis E. Consuming safe food and avoiding drinking water that has come from a potentially unsafe source, as well as proper disposal of sanitary waste are good examples of safe hygiene and sanitation.

The signs and symptoms of Viral Hepatitis include jaundice which causes yellowing of the skin and eyes, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, low grade fever, headache and dark urine.

Key messages of the World Hepatitis Day 2017

Eliminate hepatitis

Get involved, every action is an action towards elimination of viral hepatitis

Prevent hepatitis – know the risks

Unsafe blood, unsafe injections, sharing drug-injection equipment and sex without condoms can all result in hepatitis infection

Prevent hepatitis – demand safe injections

2 million people contract hepatitis from unsafe injections annually. Using sterile, single-use syringes can prevent these infections

Prevent hepatitis – vaccinate children

Approximately 780 000 persons die each year from hepatitis B infection. A safe and effective vaccine can protect from hepatitis B infection for life.

Prevent hepatitis – get tested, seek treatment

Effective medicines exist to treat hepatitis B and cure hepatitis C

Complications

- Hepatitis B and C viruses can cause chronic hepatitis, in which the infection is prolonged, sometimes lifelong.
- Chronic hepatitis can lead to liver cirrhosis, failure, and cancer.
- Hepatitis A and E usually resolve themselves.
- The theme for World Hepatitis 2017 global campaign is ELIMINATE HEPATITIS.