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July 18th, 2023

World Hepatitis Day is July 28, 2023

Routine screening for hepatitis C and vaccination for hepatitis A and B will decrease chance of illness.

Benzie-Leelanau District Health Department (BLDHD) and the Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance (NMPHA) are recognizing World Hepatitis Day (WHD), which raises awareness about viral hepatitis and the steps people can take to prevent and manage this disease. BLDHD offers vaccines for hepatitis A and B and free rapid hepatitis C screening.

“Viral hepatitis is a serious, preventable public health threat that we are diligently fighting,” says Dan Thorell, BLDHD Health Officer. “It’s important that we continue to offer education, screenings, and vaccinations to people. And it’s important that people living with hepatitis know about their condition so they can make informed choices about their healthcare.”

There are at least five types of viral hepatitis. The three most common in the United States are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

- Hepatitis A is easily transmitted from person to person or contaminated food. It causes an acute infection that usually improves without treatment but can cause severe illness.
- Hepatitis B and hepatitis C can be spread through sex or sharing needles. They can cause a chronic infection, which can lead to liver disease including cancer.
- There is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis A and B. There is not one for hepatitis C.

Hepatitis symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, diarrhea, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark-colored urine, and jaundice, according to BLDHD Medical Director Joshua Meyerson. The disease can also cause liver infection and scarring.

According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](http://www.who.int), hepatitis is a group of viral infections that lead to a range of health problems, such as liver cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver failure. More than 1.4 million deaths per year are caused by hepatitis B and C alone. WHO has set a goal of ending viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030. Reaching this goal requires increased awareness, prevention, testing, and treatment. Some of the key steps people can take to prevent hepatitis are getting vaccinated, practicing safe sex, and avoiding sharing needles or other drug paraphernalia.

BLDHD offers free syringe services through their Harm Reduction Program. Residents can access free HIV and hepatitis C testing, resources and referrals for substance use disorder, training in overdose prevention with Narcan, basic wound care supplies and other sterile equipment, to help decrease the spread of infections like HIV and hepatitis C.

For more information or help with scheduling a visit, call BLDHD at 231-882-4409, extension 3. Michigan’s Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) offers low-cost hepatitis C treatment through their [“We Tre at Hep C” program](#).

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Proud member of the [Northern Michigan Public Health Alliance](#): 7 local health departments advocating for public health.