

MAY 08 2012

Dear OTP Colleagues:

This letter is a brief reminder that May is National Hepatitis Awareness Month. An estimated 3.5–5.3 million Americans are living with chronic (lifelong) hepatitis B or hepatitis C virus infection. Most of them do not know that they are infected, placing them at greater risk for severe, even fatal, complications from the disease and increasing the likelihood that they will spread the virus to others. We encourage you to use Hepatitis Awareness Month to learn more about this “silent epidemic.” One place to start learning more is the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Hepatitis Awareness Month website, <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HEPAwarenessMonth.htm>.

This year, May 19th will serve as the first ever hepatitis testing day (<http://www.cdc.gov/Hepatitis/TestingDay>) in the United States. Since chronic hepatitis often does not cause any symptoms until serious liver damage has been done, testing for hepatitis is crucial. The CDC’s Division of Viral Hepatitis is developing an online risk assessment that will be launched this month. The online hepatitis risk assessment is designed to determine an individual’s risk for viral hepatitis and asks questions based upon CDC’s guidelines for testing and vaccination. The hepatitis risk assessment allows individuals to answer questions privately, either in their home or in a health care setting, and print their recommendations to discuss with their doctor.

On May 12, 2011, the Department of Health and Human Services issued **Combating the Silent Epidemic of Viral Hepatitis: Action Plan for the Prevention, Care and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis** which outlines actions, based on scientific evidence and extensive real-world experience, that will serve as a roadmap for helping ensure that new cases of hepatitis are prevented, persons who are already infected are tested and informed about their infection, and they are provided with counseling, care, and treatment. A copy of the Viral Hepatitis Action Plan can be found at [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/hepatitis/actionplan\\_viralhepatitis2011.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/hepatitis/actionplan_viralhepatitis2011.pdf).

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Substance Abuse Treatment strongly encourages your participation in Hepatitis Awareness Month and hepatitis testing day, on May 19. Please see the enclosed flyer for more information on these important activities that should be of interest to your staff, patients, and their family members.

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For additional information about SAMHSA hepatitis activities, please contact Anthony Campbell RPh., D.O. [anthony.campbell@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:anthony.campbell@samhsa.hhs.gov).

Sincerely,

[Signed by Peter J. Delany.]

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Enclosure

# MAY IS HEPATITIS AWARENESS MONTH

## *May 19 is the first national observance of Hepatitis Testing Day*

### Did You Know...

- 3.5–5.3 million Americans are living with chronic (lifelong) viral hepatitis—hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Most of them do not know that they are infected, placing them at greater risk for severe, even fatal, complications from the disease and increasing the likelihood that they will spread the virus to others.
- A specific blood test is the only way to know if you have viral hepatitis.
- Hepatitis B and C viruses can cause chronic hepatitis, leading to cirrhosis, liver failure, and liver cancer.
- In recent years, U.S. death rates due to chronic hepatitis C virus infection have outpaced death rates due to HIV infection.
- Anyone can get hepatitis B or C, but some populations are disproportionately burdened with these infections, including African Americans; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; past and current injection drug users; persons born between 1945-1965; and gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.
- Hepatitis B can be transmitted through exposure to blood or through sex. Hepatitis C is mainly transmitted through exposure to blood.
- Hepatitis B can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine. There is no hepatitis C vaccine.
- Treatments exist for both hepatitis B and C.

### Viral Hepatitis Action Plan Seeks to Address the Silent Epidemic of Viral Hepatitis

The Federal Government, including Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)/Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) is committed to ensuring that new cases of viral hepatitis are prevented and that people who are already infected are tested and provided with counseling, care, and treatment. Under the leadership of the Office of HIV/AIDS and Infectious Disease Policy (<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/ohap/index.html>), agencies across the government are collaborating to implement the *Action Plan for the Prevention, Care and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis* (<http://www.aids.gov/hepatitis>), which seeks to increase the proportion of Americans who are aware of their viral hepatitis infection; reduce the number of new cases of hepatitis C infection; and eliminate mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B.

### Please Join Us!

As part of our engagement in the Action Plan, SAMHSA/CSAT is proud to be:

- Observing Hepatitis Awareness Month in May.
- Supporting May 19, the 1<sup>st</sup> Hepatitis Testing Day.

Please join us. Start **today** by thinking about how you will make the best use of Hepatitis Awareness Month and Hepatitis Testing Day to educate, inform and mobilize your:

- Colleagues
- Patients and clients
- Providers
- Grantees and partners

There are many ways to help raise awareness of the facts about viral hepatitis and promote screening, testing and vaccination. Don't miss these important opportunities to remind both health care providers and the public who should be tested for chronic viral hepatitis.

### Hepatitis Education Materials

To assist your efforts, Federal partners have worked together to compile both patient and health care provider education materials on viral hepatitis from across the U.S. government. You can view and download these materials through the CDCNPIN database, which is searchable at <http://cdcnpin.org/scripts/search/matlSearch.aspx>. Custom searches will be available soon on a variety of topics, including:

- Hepatitis B materials for
  - Patient or public education
  - Healthcare providers
- Hepatitis C materials for
  - Patient or public education
  - Healthcare providers

Additional information and web tools from the CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis soon will be available to help you observe Hepatitis Awareness Month and Hepatitis Testing Day. For more information, visit the CDC's Hepatitis Testing Day website (<http://www.cdc.gov/Hepatitis/HepatitisTestingDay.htm>) and check back throughout April and May as new items are added.