

Today (July 28<sup>th</sup>) is World Hepatitis Day, which aims to raise awareness about viral hepatitis, a silent killer you may not have heard of. Viral hepatitis is a leading cause of death globally, accounting for over 1.3 million deaths per year largely due to hepatitis C and hepatitis B – more deaths annually than either HIV/AIDS or malaria!

Viral hepatitis is not limited to one location or a specific group of people; it is a truly a global epidemic that affects hundreds of millions of people, many of whom are not even aware of their infection. Worldwide, an estimated 300 million people are unaware they are living with viral hepatitis and thus cannot receive treatment. If left untreated these chronic infections have a real risk of developing into fatal liver disease or liver cancer at some point in their lives and in some cases, unknowingly transmitting the infection to others further spreading the disease.

With effective vaccines and treatment for hepatitis B and a cure for hepatitis C, these deaths are largely preventable and transmission of new infections can be stopped. Without finding the undiagnosed and linking them to care and vaccinating susceptible individuals, millions will continue to suffer, and lives of friends, family, and loved ones will be lost.

Recently, the Canadian Association for the Study of the Liver has come out with new guideline recommending hepatitis C testing for Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1975). This is in addition to previous guidelines for testing anyone who received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992, foreign born individuals from countries with high rates of infection, and anyone who may have ever used an unsterilized needle-syringe. Regardless of how you got hepatitis C once you test positive, you can be cured in as little as 8 weeks with a once daily pill, which is free across most of Canada.

Additionally, testing should be done for people who are at an increased risk of hepatitis B such as foreign born individuals from countries with high rates of infection, indigenous peoples and individuals who have other risk factors for viral hepatitis. Hepatitis B medications and vaccines are freely available across Canada.

World Hepatitis Day presents an ideal opportunity: an opportunity to join together and raise the profile of viral hepatitis among the public, in our local communities and on the global health agenda, driving action forward together. On this World Hepatitis Day, we ask people from across the world and Canada to take action by reading up on viral hepatitis, talking to friends and family about it, and if you think you might be at risk go get tested and join in on the quest to find the “missing millions”.