

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **Hepatitis C on the Rise in Nova Scotia**

***Hepatitis: Know it, Confront it, Get tested.*** This year the Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia (HepNS) joins many organizations around the world to urge their citizens to get tested for Hepatitis. Preliminary data from the latest Notifiable Disease Annual Report indicate there were 250 new cases of hepatitis C diagnosed in Nova Scotia in 2012 (up from 207 cases in 2011). Despite the increase in hepatitis C diagnoses there is still a great deal of misunderstanding and lack of information about hepatitis C when compared to other blood borne pathogens, such as HIV (with only 17 new cases in 2012 – nearly 15 times fewer than hepatitis C).

HepNS works to raise awareness of Hep C via information and support services, toll free phone line, community presentations, online services and social media throughout the year. Special annual events, such as World Hepatitis Day (WHD) on July 28<sup>th</sup>, are important opportunities for HepNS to spread the word about hepatitis. On WHD in 2012, HepNS participated in setting a new Guinness World Record when 12,588 people worldwide performed the Three Wise Monkey 'See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil' actions within 24 hours. This year HepNS staff and volunteers will be taking part in the Halifax Pride Parade and will host a table at the Community Fair at the Garrison Grounds from noon to 6pm on Saturday, July 27. HepNS also developed a poster for WHD that lists the risk factors for Hep C and urges people to Get Tested!

These WHD activities will reach thousands of people with the message: **Hepatitis: Know it, Confront it, Get tested.** This message urges Nova Scotians to **know** about hepatitis, its modes of transmission, and how to reduce the risk of getting it; **confront** the misinformation and lack of knowledge surrounding hepatitis, and speak out against discrimination and stigma faced by those living with hepatitis; and most importantly, to **get tested.** With so many ways that one could come in contact with hepatitis, nearly all Nova Scotians have reason to be tested.

HepNS Blogger *Believer* writes “I am very, very healthy and have no symptoms of Hep C... I am very healthy and very proud of it. I am a long distance runner, I work out and I eat healthy... My doctor called me at home to give me the results. She said everything looked good except for one thing: she said I have antibodies for Hep C. At that time I had no idea what Hep C was and how serious it is... I had more tests and it was confirmed that I have chronic Hep C.”

Hepatitis C is spread through blood to blood contact. This can mean direct contact with a person who has Hep C; but in most cases it means being in contact with an item such a drug gear or tattooing or piercing equipment that has been in contact with someone else's blood. Other risk factors are being born to a mother who has Hep C, unprotected sex when blood is present, and blood transfusions prior to 1992 (among others). Often people who have hepatitis C are unsure how or when they were exposed to the virus. Over 250,000 Canadians are currently living with hepatitis C, and more than 5,000 of those are Nova Scotians. Moreover, it is estimated that about 20% of Canadians who have hepatitis C don't know that they have it.

Testing for hepatitis C can be done through a family doctor, or sexual health clinics around the province. Hepatitis testing is confidential, with only the person being tested, professional ordering the test, and the Public Health Agency of Canada being notified of positive results. Treatment for hepatitis in Nova Scotia is the best it has ever been. Success in clearing the virus is between 70 – 80%, and with new treatment options in the pipeline, treatment will soon have even higher success rates and fewer side effects.

HepNS blogger, *Believer*, writes about her success. “Hello everyone!!!! I won't be long on this blog, just need to share my most exciting news that I just received: My NP (Nurse Practitioner), Carla, just called to tell me that the results of my 12 week post treatment blood work is NEGATIVE. That means I am...cured. I no longer have Hep-C. I can't tell you how happy I am. I just got the call about 10 minutes ago and so I am still trying to get my head around it. This is the news I waited for since the day I was diagnosed in 2011. I went through 24 weeks of treatment (not very nice, as you know) and now it is paying off. ..Wow...nice to say this. ..I will probably not write any further blogs as I am totally cured and will be living a wonderful, healthy, Hep-C free life.

### **Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia**

HepNS is a charitable organization that reduces the impact of Hepatitis on Nova Scotians through support, information, and education. We offer a range of preventative education workshops to youth, health care workers and the general public to raise awareness, combat stigma and provide information on living healthier with hepatitis or while undergoing treatment.

Hepatitis is swelling or inflammation of the liver. Viral hepatitis is a group of liver diseases that can be caused by consuming contaminated water or food, use of contaminated needles or syringes, non-sterile piercing and tattooing equipment or practicing unsafe sex. The most common types of hepatitis in North America are A, B and C. People who have hepatitis can have symptoms ranging from mild illness to serious liver damage such as liver cancer or failure.

For further information visit: [www.HepNS.ca](http://www.HepNS.ca)

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