

Press Release

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HepNS Joins Global Petition for Action from WHO on Hepatitis

The Hepatitis Outreach Society of Nova Scotia (HepNS) has joined thousands of individuals and organizations across the globe in signing a World Hepatitis Day petition by the Hep Coalition calling on the World Health Organization (WHO) to take action against the global hepatitis C epidemic. Since 2010, more than one million people have died from complications arising from hepatitis C – an epidemic that the WHO described as a “viral time bomb.” Here in Nova Scotia, hepatitis C rates continue to rise, more than 5,000 people are living with hepatitis C, with 250 new cases reported in 2012. The petition can be found at www.hepcoalition.org

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. Despite the increase in hepatitis C in Nova Scotia 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 28th, are important opportunities for HepNS to spread the word about hepatitis. 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

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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.

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. Moreover, it is estimated that about 20% of Canadians who have hepatitis C don't know that they have it. Hepatitis C can be spread from a person who has it to other people even when that person has no symptoms and does not know that they have the virus.

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.

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. HepNS 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.

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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

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