Learn the risk factors for hepatitis

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urge the public to learn the risk factors for hepatitis C during May, Hepatitis Awareness Month. Hepatitis is caused by a virus, and it can be a serious liver disease.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "Approximately three million Americans have been infected with hepatitis C, a blood-borne virus for which most people have no symptoms."

People at risk for hepatitis C include:
• injection drug users
• people who received a blood transfusion or organ transplant prior to 1992
• people who have unprotected sex with multiple partners
• people who get a tattoo or body piercing in unsanitary conditions.

One in every 10 Americans is affected by some form of liver disease. The liver is the largest organ in the body and it is essential for survival. If the liver is not working properly, a person can become very sick and can even die.

Ask your physician about your risk of acquiring hepatitis and your possible need for vaccine. Hepatitis A is usually transmitted by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated through fecal matter containing the virus. Because of the low risk of catching hepatitis A in Alabama, vaccine is recommended only for those individuals who plan to travel to Third World countries.

Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood or body fluids. It is commonly passed on through sexual contact, intravenous drug use, and use of contaminated blood products. The virus can also be passed from mother to infant during birth.

The CDC and the Alabama Department of Public Health encourage everyone to learn the risk factors for hepatitis.

For more information, log on to www.CDC.gov/hepatitis.

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