

23 July 2012

Increasing awareness, decreasing infection for hepatitis - Hepatitis Awareness Week (23 - 29 July)

One in 12 people worldwide are living with hepatitis B or C. In Australia, hepatitis C affects more than a quarter of a million people with up to 9000 new infections occurring each year.

Hepatitis C is a major risk to public health, yet despite these high global levels, awareness of hepatitis among young people remains low.

As part of **Hepatitis Awareness Week 23 to 29 July**, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) is joining forces with Hepatitis NSW to raise awareness of hepatitis through numerous events to showcase the range of initiatives which target young people who may be at risk of hepatitis.

NSW Health data indicates that between 2004 and 2008, there was an average of 1167 15 to 25 year olds diagnosed with hepatitis C each year in NSW.

Speaking at the NSW launch of Hepatitis Awareness Week, Associate Professor Amany Zekry, Head of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, St George Hospital, said despite the high prevalence of the virus, awareness of hepatitis, especially amongst young people remains relatively low.

"There is a continued need to reduce new infections and ensure that appropriate education, information and support is reaching those at risk. Hepatitis Awareness Week provides an opportunity for the community to become better informed about the hepatitis," Associate Professor Zekry said.

"Awareness also encourages people to be tested and hopefully seek treatment if they need it - this is especially important for young people who feature prominently in both state and federal strategies for Hepatitis C and are named as a priority population for intervention," she said.

The 'Going Viral' program, coordinated by SESLHD's HIV and Related Programs Unit, is one such initiative which targets young people by developing partnerships between health services, the non-government sector and local government, and is producing real improvements in the way that young people access hepatitis C prevention information and support.

"To date, nine distinct Hepatitis C projects which directly engage with young people have resulted from this program," Associate Professor Zekry said.

"Central to Going Viral's success has been the partnership between health district services, local government the non-government sector and, most importantly, the active engagement of young people to create messages relevant to their everyday lives," she said.

The City of Sydney Youth Service's 'Be Smart About Body Art' competition and exhibition is one of the successful projects arising from the 'Going Viral' program and is being showcased as part of Hepatitis Awareness Week, together with 'Hepatitis Awareness Week' banners across Sydney's Central Business District.

HEPATITIS AWARENESS WEEK EVENTS – SOUTH EASTERN SYDNEY REGION:

The **launch of Hepatitis Awareness Week will take place on Monday, 23 July at the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre, Crown Street, Surry Hills** with various speakers including: Associate Professor Armany Zekry, Head of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, St George Hospital, Stuart Loveday, CEO, Hepatitis NSW, Tye McMahon, Manager, City of Communities, City of Sydney Council and Gary Gahan, Coordinator, Hepatitis C Programs, SESLHD.

The launch will also showcase the range of initiatives which target young people who may be at risk of hepatitis, such as the 'Going Viral' program, which targets young people by developing partnerships between health services, the non-government sector and local government, and is producing real improvements in the way that young people access hepatitis prevention information and support.

The City of Sydney Youth Service's 'Be Smart About Body Art' competition and exhibition is one of the successful projects arising from the 'Going Viral' program and is being showcased at the NSW Hepatitis Awareness Week launch.

Staff at **Kirketon Road Centre (KRC)** in Kings Cross will kick start local events for Hepatitis Awareness Week with a range of events to raise awareness locally with staff from KRC on hand to answer questions and provide information on hepatitis throughout the Week.

On Tuesday, 24 July, KRC hosts the 'Cross cooks' and Hep C Clinic from 10.00am to 12.00pm. Wednesday, 25 July will see an airbrush tattooist attend KRC to tattoo the winning tattoo designs from the 'Be Smart About Body Art' competition for the Week.

On Thursday, 26 July from 10.00am to 12.00pm, KRC will hold a community stall with information on hepatitis at the Springfield Mall, Kings Cross, with staff from KRC on hand to answer questions on hepatitis.

Friday, 27 July, KRC, together with the University of New South Wales (UNSW) will hold a community stall targeting staff and students of UNSW at the University Mall, Randwick Campus, UNSW, with staff from KRC on hand to answer questions on hepatitis.

For World Hepatitis Day on Saturday, 28 July, KRC will host a question and answer session on the topic of 'Genotype and Viral Load' at KRC.

St George Hospital's Liver Clinic will hold an information stall for staff and visitors on screening, treatment and management of hepatitis on Tuesday, 24 July in the grassed area off Belgrave Street, Kogarah. This event will aim to raise awareness on hepatitis locally, with staff from the Hospital's Liver Clinic on hand to answer questions on hepatitis and also serve patients at the Clinic with delicious afternoon tea.

The **St George Youth Service in Hurstville** will hold a Hepatitis Awareness Event on Wednesday, 25 July from 11.00am to 1.00pm aimed at engaging young people, as part of St George TAFE student orientation day.

On Thursday, 26 July, the **Central Access Service located at Sutherland Hospital** will host a morning tea and promote hepatitis C testing and treatment through fibroscans from 9.00am to 1.00pm.

For more information on hepatitis and Hepatitis Awareness Week, visit: www.hep.org.au