

May 19, 2014 is National Hepatitis testing day! Hepatitis is a general term used to describe inflammation of the liver. There are several things that can cause hepatitis such as, viruses, medications or alcohol abuse. Many times, when someone is talking about Hepatitis, they are referring to viral hepatitis. The most common viruses that cause hepatitis in the United States are Hepatitis A, B and C. In fact, there are about 4 million Americans living with Hepatitis B or C infection and most of them do not even know it.

Hepatitis A is spread through fecal-oral route. Often times, this means that contaminated food or water is the culprit. Unsanitary conditions cause an increase in the spread of this disease. Many individuals do not have any symptoms with Hepatitis A. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children and these may include: fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain or jaundice. Once you've had Hepatitis A, you cannot get it again. Your body develops immunity to the virus after exposure. However, there is also a two-dose vaccine series for this particular virus that you may start at one year of age. This vaccine is often recommended for individuals traveling outside of the United States. Most individuals who contract Hepatitis A will recover with no lasting organ damage. On the other hand, Hepatitis A can sometimes cause the infected individual to become sick for months, develop liver failure and cause death.

There is also a vaccine available for Hepatitis B. This vaccine is a three-dose series that typically starts at birth. If you don't have record of this series or if you are not sure that you've had this vaccine, it is not harmful to get this vaccine series again to be sure you are protected. Many health professionals are required to show proof of vaccination due to the risk of blood exposure in the workplace. You may want to talk to your doctor about this vaccine if you are not sure that you've had it. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with blood, semen, or other body fluids infected with the virus. Certain activities contribute to the spread of Hepatitis B such as birth, intercourse, sharing needles or razors, or direct contact with open sores of an infected person. As with Hepatitis A, individuals with Hepatitis B may have the virus in their body and not even know it. Others will develop symptoms similar to those of Hepatitis A, including liver disease.

Hepatitis C is almost exclusively spread through blood contact. Activities such as sharing needles to inject drugs, having non-professional tattoos, having intercourse with infected individuals, being born to a mother who has the virus, or accidental needles sticks in the health care setting are all potential risks for contracting Hepatitis C. There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C however; there is testing available and treatment to prevent further damage to the body. The Hocking County Health Department offers weekly testing by appointment to check for exposure to this virus. It is recommended that anyone who has been exposed to an accidental needle stick or blood spill, has had a non-professional tattoo (not at a parlor), has had intercourse with an infected partner, injected drugs, has had history of a blood transfusion/organ transplant before July 1992, **or was born between the years 1945-1965** to get tested for Hepatitis C.

Please call the Hocking County Health Department at (740)385-3030 to make an appointment for testing or if you have any questions about available vaccines.