



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

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THE AIDS INSTITUTE HIGHLIGHTS HEPATITIS AWARENESS DAY AT FLORIDA CAPITOL

Tampa, FL – The AIDS Institute strongly supports the Florida Department of Health’s Hepatitis Awareness Day at the Florida Capitol, Tuesday March 18, 2008. The focus of this day is to highlight the importance of hepatitis testing, vaccine, prevention methods, and modes of transmission.

“As advocates, we express the sincere hope that this day will serve as a wake up call, alerting our Florida communities and elected officials about the on-going threat posed by viral hepatitis and the need for more resources to address hepatitis prevention and care. As a nation, we should be spending more money on hepatitis prevention, care and treatment,” said Dr. Gene Copello, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “Many of our current infections could have been avoided if we had stronger prevention efforts, and many people who are now suffering from viral hepatitis lack adequate access to care.”

Hepatitis, an often life-threatening inflammation of the liver, is caused by one of five distinct viruses. In the United States, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C are the most common types. Hepatitis A (47% of all cases) is caused by hepatitis A virus (HAV), hepatitis B (34% of all cases) is caused by hepatitis B virus (HBV), and hepatitis C (16% of all cases) is caused by hepatitis C virus (HCV). Both hepatitis A (HAV) and B (HBV) are vaccine preventable.

“All citizens must take charge of their health, ask questions about available options, and work with their healthcare providers to lead a healthy lifestyle,” said Florida’s State Surgeon General Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H. According to the Florida Department of Health’s Press Statement, most county health departments throughout Florida offer free hepatitis vaccine and testing to adults at risk. During *Hepatitis Awareness Day at the Capitol*, the Leon County Health Department provided free hepatitis A and B vaccines to adults. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. Almost four million Americans and over 300,000 Floridians are infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hepatitis C is referred to as the ‘*silent epidemic*’ because most people are unaware they are infected due to a lack of symptoms. The disease often lies undetected for 20-30 years and is a leading cause of liver cirrhosis and liver failure.

“The AIDS Institute is committed to continuing to support hepatitis education and awareness,” comments Michelle Scavnicky, Director of Education for The AIDS Institute. “Hepatitis is widely prevalent, often undiagnosed and needs to be recognized as a public health threat. Hepatitis often leads to significant disease in the long term, much of which is preventable through proper education and awareness.”

Co-infection of HIV/HCV continues to impact about one third of the 1.1 million people with HIV disease in the United States. HCV can progress two to three times faster in co-infected patients, leading to higher rates of cirrhosis and end stage liver disease than in the mono-infected. In the last few years, end stage liver disease caused by HCV has emerged as a leading cause of death for people with HIV and AIDS, pushing HCV to the forefront of AIDS care and treatment. It is critically important for HIV physicians and hepatologists to work together for the benefit of co-infected patients.

For more information about Hepatitis, go to:

Florida Department of Health Hepatitis Section - http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/aids/hep/index.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis

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For more information and to become involved in AIDS advocacy work, please contact
The AIDS Institute at: (202) 835-8373, or by email at: Info@theaidsinstitute.org or www.TheAIDSInstitute.org
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through public policy research, advocacy and education.