



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



You Can't Live Without Your Liver. Know How to Treat it Right

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month

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BURLINGTON – Everything you eat and drink passes through one vital organ of your body, the liver. More than 500 life functions such as storing vitamins and filtering toxins, are performed there. But three different viruses – hepatitis A, B and C – as well as excessive intake of alcohol or acetaminophen can harm the liver, affecting nearly every part of your body.

During Hepatitis Awareness Month, the Vermont Department of Health and community partners will provide education and information promoting liver health, vaccination, and hepatitis prevention.

Hepatitis A, B and C virus can cause dangerous swelling or inflammation of the liver. There are vaccines that can protect people from hepatitis A and B, but no vaccine for hepatitis C.

“You can't live without your liver and it is important to keep it as healthy as possible,” said State Epidemiologist Patsy Kelso. “We're working to inform more Vermonters about the causes and risk factors for different types of hepatitis.”

During May, Health Department offices in White River Junction, St. Albans, Springfield, Rutland, Burlington, Brattleboro and Bennington will reach out to their communities with information and resources that promote liver health and hepatitis awareness.

The Department of Health is also developing a resource guide for people living with hepatitis, and provides workshops throughout the year for people at high risk for hepatitis.

Community partners who offer information about hepatitis include the *R.U.12?* Community Center in Winooski, the Good Neighbor Clinic in White River Junction, HowardCenter/Safe Recovery, Vermont CARES in St. Johnsbury, the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont in Brattleboro, and the HIV/HCV Resource Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire.

There are some simple things you can do to keep you - and your liver - healthy:

Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B

Talk to your healthcare provider about these vaccines. If you don't have a medical provider, contact your local office of the Vermont Department of Health. They will be able to link you to someone who can offer the vaccine.

Get tested for hepatitis C

If you have received blood transfusions or donated organs before 1992 or ever shared needles or syringes you may be at risk for hepatitis C. If you think you have been exposed to hepatitis C, or if you have engaged in any behaviors that put you at risk, ask your healthcare provider for an antibody test. An antibody test will tell you if you have ever been exposed, and a provider can help you figure out the next steps you should take.

Limit your alcohol intake

Drink no more than one alcoholic drink a day for women, and two drinks for men. Excessive alcohol can increase the risk of cirrhosis and liver cancer, especially in people with hepatitis B or C virus.

Limit the amount of acetaminophen you take

Acetaminophen can be damaging for the liver of healthy people, and is even worse for people living with hepatitis A, B, or C. Talk to your doctor if you routinely take acetaminophen, and never combine it with alcohol.

Eat a healthy diet, drink lots of water, and get plenty of exercise.

Being overweight or obese can be hard on your liver.

For more information about hepatitis A, B, and C go to healthvermont.gov or visit your **local Health Department district office**.

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