

## ***Black Infection Rate Twice That of Hispanics and Whites***

# **Hepatitis C Seminar to Address Issues of A Silent Killer Within the African-American Community**

The American Liver Foundation (ALF) is offering a free educational seminar to address the issue of hepatitis C within the African-American community on Friday, February 28, at the Hawthorne Memorial Center. The "We Need To Know" seminar will address the issues surrounding hepatitis C in the Black community including increased risk factors, the importance of expanded education and prevention efforts, and African-American response to treatment.

According to the American Liver Foundation, hepatitis C is four times more prevalent than HIV, and Blacks in the United States are the largest infected ethnic group in America, with a rate of infection twice that of Hispanics and Whites. A national poll also shows Blacks are not as aware of the risk factors or symptoms of hepatitis C, as the general public.

"This is a vitally important program," said Donna Gracon, ALF's Greater Los Angeles Chapter Director. "We want to provide African-American communities with the information they need to fight hepatitis C."

Called a silent killer because symptoms may not show up until it is too late, deaths from hepatitis C are expected to triple in the next 10 years. The

virus is the leading reason for liver transplants, yet there is no cure or vaccine for hepatitis C. Over 4 million Americans have hepatitis C (600,000 in California).

Unfortunately, several risk factors place African-Americans of higher risk for contracting hepatitis C - including the fact Blacks are at substantially higher risk for sickle cell anemia - a disease that increases the chances of needing blood transfusions. There are also more than 3 million African-Americans in the health care profession, putting them at increased risk of exposure for blood infected with the hepatitis C virus.

Spread by blood to blood contact, hepatitis C risk factors include:

- a blood transfusion before 1992
- hemodialysis (treatment with a kidney machine)
- contact with blood (workplace, military, prison)
- having a tattoo or body piercing
- intra-nasal drug use (snorting) - even just once
- sharing a razor, hair clippers, toothbrush or nail clippers
- unprotected sex with multiple partners

In addition to increased risk factors, the complications of

hepatitis C - like end-stage liver disease, death from cirrhosis, and liver cancer - appear to be more common in African-Americans.

These and other issues will be addressed by health professionals presenting at the seminar, including Dr. Mark Lott of Inglewood; Val Peacock, R.N., Dumont-UCLA Liver Transplant Center; and Dr. John C. Hoefs, UCI Medical Center. A panel of hepatitis C awareness advocates will also discuss their personal stories of life with hepatitis C.

Behavioral Health Services, the City of Hawthorne, Fujisawa Healthcare, Robert F. Kennedy Medical Center, and Roche Laboratories have collaborated on and support the "We Need to Know" efforts.

The seminar is for anyone interested in hearing more about hepatitis C - community members, hepatitis C patients, family members, healthcare workers, social service and treatment providers, clergy, advocates and leaders.

"We Need To Know" will be held at the Hawthorne Memorial Center (3901 W. El Segundo Blvd.) in Hawthorne from 8:30 to 12:30 p.m. For more information; or to confirm attendance call 310-670-4624.

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