

HEALTH ALERT!

Hepatitis B Puts a Community at Risk for Liver Cancer

(NAPSA)—If asked to rank the top ten deadliest diseases, many of us would exclude liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). In fact, chronic hepatitis B affects more than 350 million people worldwide and its serious complications—such as severe liver damage, cirrhosis or scarring of the liver and liver cancer—will lead to one million deaths this year.

Transmitted through the blood or body fluids, sexual contact, injection drug use or perinatally from mother to child, the virus is 50 to 100 times more contagious than HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. For some people, HBV is cleared by their immune systems after initial infection. For others—those who do not clear the virus and develop chronic hepatitis B—HBV remains active and works to take control of the liver. Unfortunately, many people may not know they are infected. As a result, carriers of the virus may unknowingly infect family members or friends with whom they come into contact.

In the United States, more than half of the estimated 1.25 million people infected with chronic hepatitis B are of Asian descent. There is an especially high incidence of hepatitis B transmission from mother to newborn among Asian Pacific Americans. In fact, up to 20,000 women in the United States who give birth each year have chronic hepatitis B, and 54 percent of these are Asian Pacific Americans. According to the Asian Liver Center at Stanford University, approximately 25 percent of Asian Pacific Americans with chronic hepatitis B develop liver cancer.

“The greatest health disparity

between Asian Americans and white Americans is liver cancer, 80 percent caused by chronic hepatitis B infection. About 10 percent of Asian Pacific Americans have chronic hepatitis B infection compared with 0.1 percent of white Americans,” said Samuel So, MD, FACS, Asian Liver Center.

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The best protection against contracting hepatitis B and reducing the risk of disease transmission is testing for the virus and getting preventative vaccinations at health centers, as well as avoiding high-risk behaviors such as having unprotected sex, sharing IV needles and getting tattoos with unsterilized needles.

Early diagnosis and medical intervention provides the best chance for preventing liver damage caused by chronic hepatitis B. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved Hepsera™ (adefovir dipivoxil) for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B in adults. The availability of this drug is encouraging news because Hepsera has been shown to be an effective new treatment option, while the two previously available drugs for the condition have specific limitations.

To learn more about chronic hepatitis B, visit the Hepatitis B Foundation Web site at www.hepb.org.