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DOH EDUCATES FLORIDIANS ABOUT HEPATITIS IN OCTOBER FOR NATIONAL LIVER AWARENESS MONTH

--DOH Hepatitis Program and County Health Departments Offer Free Hepatitis Vaccines--

TALLAHASSEE – In commemoration of National Liver Awareness Month, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) warns Floridians of the dangers of liver diseases, especially viral hepatitis. Over 25 million Americans, one in every 10, are affected by some form of liver disease. The goal of National Liver Awareness Month is to educate people on the functions of the liver and to explain health problems associated with the liver.

“The liver is one of the most important organs in the body, and it is essential to have a healthy liver for survival,” DOH Secretary M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D., said. “The liver performs many varied and complex functions. It cleans and purifies the blood supply, in addition to breaking down and producing certain chemical substances. The Department is committed to educating Floridians about the importance of having a healthy liver for a healthier life.”

Some of the most frequently diagnosed liver diseases are hepatitis, cirrhosis and fatty liver. Hepatitis is characterized by inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A, B and C are the most common types of viral hepatitis in the United States. If symptoms are present, they may include nausea, fever, weakness, loss of appetite and jaundice.

DOH’s Hepatitis Program and the county health departments (CHD) promote statewide prevention activities, such as free hepatitis A and B vaccines to qualified clients. Free laboratory testing for hepatitis B and C for adults with an increased risk of infection is another prevention activity offered by CHDs and the Department’s Hepatitis Program.

It is estimated that over four million Americans and over 300,000 Floridians are infected with the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C is referred to as the “silent epidemic” because most people have no symptoms and do not know they are infected. The disease often lies undetected for 20-30 years and is a leading cause of cirrhosis and liver failure.

Throughout National Liver Awareness Month, DOH encourages all Floridians to learn more about the function of the liver, how to keep this vital organ healthy and to know their hepatitis status.

DOH’s Florida Hepatitis Program began in 1999. The Program provides statewide education, awareness activities and prevention projects. Since early 2001, the Program has made hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines and hepatitis A, B, and C testing available to all counties, at no cost for adults at increased risk for infection or the serious consequences of infection. The Hepatitis Program has worked with numerous community-based organizations to provide education, vaccination and testing to the population in the most accessible manner possible. For more information, visit the DOH Web site at www.doh.state.fl.us and select “hepatitis” from the drop box.

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