



**Public Health**  
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**Champaign-Urbana Public Health District**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Why The World Should Ask “Am I Number 12?”**

*Champaign-Urbana Public Health District Honors  
World Hepatitis Day 2009*

Champaign, IL – The Champaign-Urbana Public Health District (CUPHD) joins the World Hepatitis Alliance and over 200 patient groups in honoring World Hepatitis Day 2009 by requesting that local residents ask themselves “Am I Number 12?” This marketing campaign was designed to increase awareness of the shocking statistic that one in twelve people in the world are living with hepatitis B or hepatitis C and the majority of those infected are unaware. Hepatitis is a serious disease which, left untreated, can lead to liver scarring (cirrhosis) and potentially to liver cancer, liver failure and death. Hepatitis is the cause of death for over one million people in the world annually.

Hepatitis, which means “liver inflammation”, is often caused by a virus. Of the five completely different viruses that cause hepatitis, B & C are the only two that can become chronic, causing long-term illness. Hepatitis is acute when it lasts less than six months and chronic when it persists longer. It is estimated that more than 500 million people around the world are currently infected with hepatitis B or C and one in three people have been exposed to one or both viruses.

“Hepatitis is a silent killer,” said Penny Shonkwiler, Program Coordinator for CUPHD, “People can live with the virus for many years without knowing they are infected, but can still spread the virus to others. Many types of hepatitis are preventable through vaccines and avoiding contact with the blood of infected people. Those interested in learning more about hepatitis preventative measures should speak to their health care provider.”

The two most concerning strains of hepatitis are B & C. The hepatitis B virus is spread through direct contact with infected blood and sexual fluids. Hepatitis B can be prevented through vaccination or treated with antiviral medications. The hepatitis C virus is spread through direct contact with infected blood. There is currently no vaccine

against hepatitis C and antiviral medications have been shown to be only effective in over half of those diagnosed with the disease. Currently, hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver transplants in the United States. Many people do not have symptoms if they contract hepatitis B or C, although they can still transmit the disease to others.

The most common routes of infection are:

- Blood transfusions before 1992
- Medical or dental interventions in countries where equipment is not adequately sterilized
- Mother to infant during childbirth
- Sexual transmission (in the case of hepatitis B)
- Sharing equipment for injecting drugs
- Sharing straws, noses etc. for snorting cocaine
- Sharing razors, toothbrushes or other household articles
- Tattooing and body piercing if done using unsterile equipment

Currently the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District provides services for hepatitis through the Hepatitis Integration Project. This project assesses risk factors for viral hepatitis among all CUPHD clients and performs appropriate testing for HCV infection. The Hepatitis Integration Project provides a client-centered viral hepatitis prevention counseling and support group, and provides Hepatitis A & B immunizations to persons in appropriate risk groups.

For more information about the World Hepatitis Day 2009, the Hepatitis Integration Project, or any other CUPHD programs and services, please call 217-352-7961 or visit CUPHD on the web at [www.c-uphd.org](http://www.c-uphd.org).

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