



Australian Hepatitis Council



1 October 2005

## **What do you know about hepatitis C? Find out from 1 October, 1st International Hepatitis C Awareness Day**

How many Australians have hepatitis C? One in every 85, that's nearly 250,000.

Despite this, the level of knowledge in the Australian community about this epidemic is low and misinformation is rife.

This is why increasing public knowledge of hepatitis C is a high priority in the recently released National Hepatitis C Strategy.

On this first International Hepatitis C Awareness Day, the Australian Hepatitis Council (AHC) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) have joined forces to call for speedy action to increase public awareness.

"We have to work harder to make sure all Australians understand the transmission and risk behaviours," said Helen Tyrrell, Executive Officer of the Australian Hepatitis Council.

Ms Tyrrell said that misinformation about the virus is hampering efforts to respond to the epidemic. "One person every 32 minutes is infected with the virus. It is vital that we act now."

Hepatitis C is a slowly progressing infection of the liver, there may be no symptoms at first but if left untreated it can lead to cirrhosis and in some cases liver cancer decades later.

It is a blood borne virus that can be spread by infected blood entering the bloodstream of another person. Anyone who has ever been involved in the following activities should consider talking to their GP or their local hepatitis council about testing:

- shared drug injecting equipment (even once)
- received a blood transfusion or blood products prior to 1990
- had a tattoo, body piercing, acupuncture, medical or dental procedure using unsterile techniques either in Australia or overseas.

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C but there are effective treatments.

Professor Michael Kidd, President of the RACGP, says, "The RACGP is pleased to support this awareness day. General practitioners play a key role in the diagnosis, support and clinical care of people living with hepatitis C."

Hepatitis C is a major public health challenge for Australia with significant costs to the government and the taxpayer.

AHC and RACGP urge anyone who thinks they may have contracted the virus or seeks information about hepatitis C to visit the AHC website at [www.hepatitisaustralia.com](http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com), contact their nearest state or territory hepatitis council or speak with their general practitioner.

### **Media contacts**

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