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## **World Hepatitis Day**

World Hepatitis Day takes place every year on July 28. Viral hepatitis affects millions of people worldwide, causing both acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) liver disease. The World Health Organization (WHO) data show an estimated 325 million people across the globe are living with chronic hepatitis B or chronic hepatitis C. Viral hepatitis causes more than one million deaths each year, a number comparable to deaths caused by tuberculosis and HIV combined. While deaths from tuberculosis and HIV have been declining, deaths from hepatitis are increasing.

There are five different hepatitis viruses ó A, B, C, D and E. They can have different modes of transmission, affect different populations, and result in different health outcomes.

Hepatitis A is primarily spread when someone ingests the virus from contact with food, drinks, or objects contaminated by feces from an infected person or has close personal contact with someone who is infected. Hepatitis A does not cause chronic liver disease and is rarely fatal, but it can cause serious symptoms. This type of hepatitis can be prevented through improved sanitation, food safety, and vaccination.

Hepatitis B is spread through contact with blood and other body fluids through injection drug use, unsterile medical equipment, and sexual contact. It can also be spread during birth from an infected mother to her baby. The hepatitis B virus can cause both acute and chronic infection, ranging in severity from a mild illness to a serious, chronic illness. Getting the hepatitis B vaccine is the most effective way to prevent hepatitis B. In many parts of the world, widespread infant vaccination programs have led to dramatic declines of new hepatitis B cases.

Hepatitis C is spread through contact with blood of an infected person, through injection drug use, and through unsafe medical injections and other medical procedures. Mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis C is also possible. Hepatitis C can cause both acute and chronic infections, but most people who are infected develop a chronic infection, which can lead to liver cirrhosis or liver cancer. There is currently no vaccine for hepatitis C, but research in this area is ongoing. The first step for people living with hepatitis C to benefit from treatments is to be tested and linked to care.

Hepatitis D & E are not as common in the United States. Hepatitis D only occurs in people who are already infected with the hepatitis B virus, and hepatitis E is spread mainly through contaminated drinking water.

The Iroquois County Public Health Department has the hepatitis A and B vaccines available for children and adults. Call the health department at 815-432-2483 for more information or to schedule an appointment.