

**Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care**

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Hepatitis C Public Awareness Campaign

In Ontario, there are presently 110,000 people who have been infected with hepatitis C (HCV). Researchers estimate that about 35,000 of these people do not know they are infected. The Ontario government wants to increase awareness about hepatitis C for two reasons – so that people who are at risk of having the disease will get tested and seek treatment where necessary, and so that people will learn how to decrease their risk of contracting and transmitting hepatitis C.

In order to accomplish this goal, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will be initiating a public awareness campaign which will use television advertising to guide viewers to the new hepatitis C website, www.hepOntario.ca. The main feature of the website is a self-assessment tool that will help people assess their risks of exposure to hepatitis C.

As a health care provider, you play an important role in identifying and educating people with illnesses such as hepatitis C. I have enclosed a sample patient brochure which includes a printed version of the self-assessment tool as well as some general information on hepatitis C. To obtain copies of the brochure for patients who may be or may have been at risk for hepatitis C, and for more information on hepatitis C, please call the ministry INFOLine at 1-877-234-4343 (TTY 1-800-387-5559) or visit www.hepOntario.ca. The patient brochure is available at no cost.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care provides people with chronic liver disease, including hepatitis C carriers, with hepatitis A and B vaccines at no cost. The hepatitis B vaccine has been available since 1998 and the hepatitis A vaccine was added to the 'Pre-exposure High Risk Program' in 2003. Physicians can access these vaccines by contacting their local health units.

We often do not see patients in the health care system until 20 years after they are infected because many remain asymptomatic. Your help is much needed to educate the public, particularly those who are most at risk for hepatitis C.

Thank you in advance for all of your hard work in keeping Ontarians healthy.

Sincerely,

Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care