



For Immediate Release – 20 July 2011

Love Your Liver Health Fair: AIDS Vancouver Island to mark World Hepatitis Day July 28

Victoria – World Hepatitis Day is being marked around the world on July 28 to raise public awareness about hepatitis B and C, two forms of life-threatening liver disease. Today, approximately 500 million people – one in 12 worldwide – are infected with chronic viral hepatitis B or C. In Canada, an estimated 600,000 people have hepatitis, with many who are unaware of their status.

To mark the day, AIDS Vancouver Island (AVI) will be hosting the 2nd Annual Love Your Liver Health Fair in Centennial Square from 11am to 2 pm on Thursday, July 28. Events are also being held in Courtenay and Campbell River. All are welcome.

There will be complimentary food, displays by local service providers, speeches, as well as hepatitis testing from the VIHA street nurses. The goal of the event is to provide information about the importance of being tested for hepatitis and HIV, to provide information about traditional and complimentary treatments, to provide hope for those living with hepatitis or who are co-infected with HIV, and to remember individuals who have died due to hepatitis.

“It is important to mark World Hepatitis Day and the fact that approximately 1 in 12 people worldwide are infected with viral hepatitis – that’s over 500 million people – and the majority does not know they are infected,” said Katrina Jensen, executive director of AVI. “While rates in Canada are not as high as global figures, British Columbia boasts hepatitis C rates that are much higher than the national average.”

The theme for this first official WHO-sponsored World Hepatitis Day is “Hepatitis affects everyone, everywhere. Know it. Confront it,” highlighting the huge reach of this epidemic, the importance of getting informed and the need to use that information to tackle the stigma that has kept this epidemic so silent.

Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne virus in North America and the primary reason for liver transplants in Canada and the United States. According to the BC Centre for Disease Control, rates of hepatitis C in British Columbia are higher than the Canadian average with 54.9 new cases per 100,000 people in 2009, compared to 33.7 cases per 100,000 nationally. In Southern Vancouver Island, the rate of hepatitis C infection was 48.1 cases per 100,000 in 2009, while rates in the Central and North Island are much higher at 76 cases per 100,000. The number of acute hepatitis B cases identified in BC has continued to decline, keeping below the national rate since 2002.

“Yet, hepatitis can be prevented and there are many services available to support people with hepatitis. Getting tested is the first step in confronting the disease,” said Jensen.

Hepatitis C is transmitted by blood-to-blood contact and can be transmitted through the sharing of injection equipment, crack stems, or snorting straws, piercing or tattoo equipment, and may be transmitted, although it is rare, through the sharing of anything that might have blood on it (ex. razors, nail clippers and toothbrushes) or unprotected sex.



Hepatitis B can be transmitted through direct blood-to-blood contact, through unprotected sex, unsterile needles, or from an infected woman to her newborn during birth. Testing is available through your family doctor or your local VIHA Public Health Unit.

AIDS Vancouver Island provides community health services focused on the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C. This event is made possible by the support of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

- 30 -

For interviews or more information, please contact:

Andrea Langlois
Manager of Communications
250-384-2366 ext 2261
communications@avi.org

*Speeches will take place at approximately 1:15pm.

For more statistics or information about hepatitis:

BC Center for Disease Control: http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/13B44CDB-740F-4417-90C2-495F6B2424C8/0/2009_CD_Annual_Report_r1.pdf

Public Health Agency of Canada: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sti-its-surv-epi/hepc/hepc-eng.php>

CATIE Hep C Info: <http://www.hepcinfo.ca/>