

Chief Health Officer Alert Hepatitis C Cluster

Information for patients

Friday, 9 April 2010

The Victorian Department of Health has identified a cluster of hepatitis C cases among patients treated by a medical professional at Croydon Day Surgery between August 2008 and August 2009. The doctor had worked at the clinic from 2006 to 2009.

The Department of Health is contacting people treated by this doctor to inform them of their potential risk of exposure to hepatitis C and to offer testing, referral and counselling if required.

It is important to keep in mind that only a certain proportion of patients who underwent a procedure at Croydon Day Surgery will have been treated by this doctor. Only patients considered to be at risk will be contacted directly by the Department of Health.

If contacted, please be assured your confidentiality will be protected. A free blood test for hepatitis C and counselling will be offered and if you are found to be positive for hepatitis C, you will be offered referral to a medical specialist and a counsellor if required.

The doctor has also worked at other health care facilities during the period in question but at this stage there is no evidence to suggest that there is an increased risk for patients treated at any other facility.

The Department of Health is continuing to investigate and will notify the public if this situation changes.

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C virus causes an inflammation of the liver and is primarily transmitted by blood-to-blood contact. The incubation period for hepatitis C ranges from two weeks to six months. Infection can result in both acute and chronic hepatitis.

Most acutely infected patients only develop minor symptoms and patients therefore may not be aware that they have hepatitis C. Others may develop symptoms such as dark urine and yellow skin and eyes.

Approximately one third of patients infected with hepatitis C will clear the virus from their blood. About 70% of patients who have been infected may develop chronic hepatitis C and continue to have the virus in their blood. Of those, approximately 10-20% may develop liver cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and an estimated 5% may develop liver cancer.

How is hepatitis C diagnosed?

The diagnosis of hepatitis C infection is made by testing for hepatitis C virus antibody in the blood and by testing for viral genetic material in the blood (RNA). Treatment for hepatitis C is available with good success rates depending on the genotype of the virus.

Where can I get more information?

If you are concerned about your health status, have any further questions and have been treated at Croydon Day Surgery between 2006 and mid December 2009, please contact the Department of Health's call centre on 1300 365 677. The call centre operates from 8 am to 10 pm.

Further information about hepatitis C can be obtained from your GP and on the Department of Health's websites at:

www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/hepc

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Hepatitis_C_the-facts?open

www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/bluebook/hepatitis_C

Additionally, you may call the Hepatitis C information line on 1800 703 003.

Yours sincerely



Dr John Carnie
Chief Health Officer