

Friday, 9 April, 2010

INVESTIGATION INTO CASES OF HEPATITIS C

The Department of Health has identified a link between a cluster of hepatitis C cases and a private medical centre following an investigation by public health experts.

Victoria's Chief Health Officer Dr John Carnie said the links were identified during routine calls with cases reported to the Department.

"During the course of routine interviews we established that three women who had tested positive for the illness had had procedures at the private medical centre," Dr Carnie said.

"We then conducted blood tests on staff which showed that one staff member, a medical practitioner, was positive for Hepatitis C.

"As we stepped up our investigations and discovered a further nine associated cases, we then notified the Medical Practitioners Board who suspended his registration.

"The link between the cluster of cases and the private medical centre was reported to the police.

"And we are continuing to examine the records of other women who have undergone surgical procedures there over the past 18 months to offer tests and counselling.

"While we cannot guarantee there will not be further infections discovered, it is hoped we will not find any further cases.

"The Department will be making contact with the affected patients.

"Any individuals who wish to make more urgent contact with the Department should ring **1300 365 677 between 8am and 10pm.**

"Because of the sensitivity and distress that this incident may cause the affected individuals, it was paramount that all the evidence was linked and confirmed before contacting the patients and telling the public.

"We must protect the privacy and confidentiality of the patients involved."

"It is important to stress that there is no Hepatitis C risk from this medical practitioner or to anyone now undergoing surgery at the private medical centre.

"I have kept the Health Minister informed of the department's actions and developments.

"It was important that patients had access to free tests and counselling and these are available now," Dr Carnie said.

General information about Hepatitis C is available on the Better Health Channel at:

<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus that causes inflammation of the liver and can be spread through blood-to-blood contact.

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