

Hepatitis C in Sandy Lake

There is a rise of hepatitis C (hep C) in Sandy Lake. Concerned about the health of the Sandy Lake community, the Public Health Nurses presented information on hep C to the Chief, Band Council, and Elder Council. These community leaders have encouraged us to educate the community about this serious disease.

What is Hepatitis?

- Hepatitis is a disease that attacks your liver
- There are different types of hepatitis
- Our main concerns are hepatitis A, B and C
- There are vaccines to prevent hepatitis A and hepatitis B
- There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C

Hepatitis C

- Hep C is a virus that damages your liver
- Even if you do not feel sick the virus can be hurting your liver
- The only way to know if you have hep C is to get a blood test
- Hep C can be treated. The earlier the better!

Why is the Liver Important?

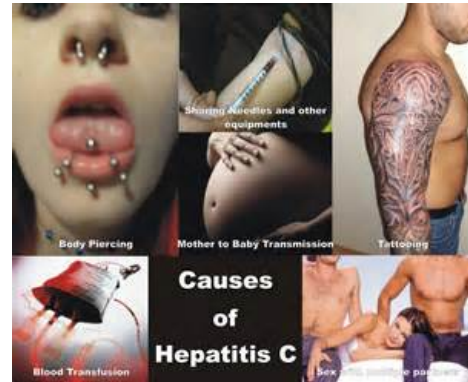
- Your liver :
 - Filters toxins from your blood
 - Helps digestion
 - Regulates hormones
- Without a working liver you cannot live!



How is Hepatitis C Spread?

Hepatitis C is spread mainly by blood to blood contact. This can happen with the following activities:

- Sharing needles (even just once)
- Sharing other drug use equipment (straws, cookers, pipes, water, drugs, filters, etc.)
- Sharing razors, nail scissors, etc.
- Sharing diabetic monitoring equipment
- Unclean tattoo & piercing needles
- Being in prison
- From hep C + mom to baby during pregnancy and delivery
- Sharing toothbrushes & other sharp personal items
- Sexual contact where blood is present (e.g. during a woman's period)
- Blood transfusion and hemodialysis (not a big risk since 1992 when blood started being tested)



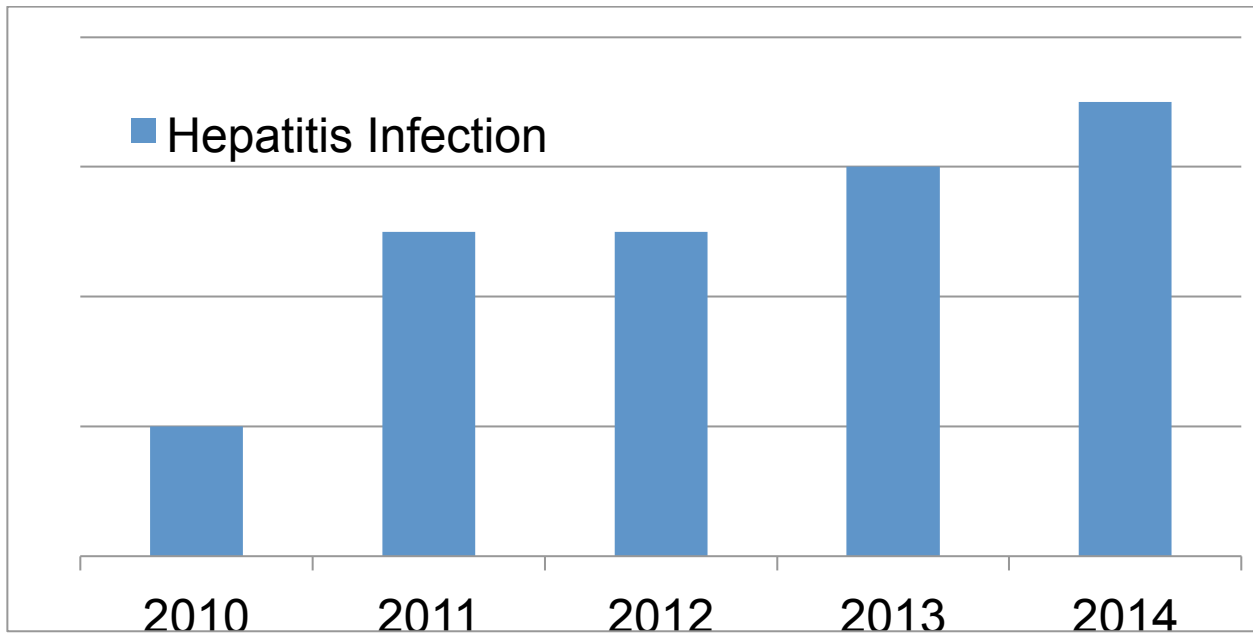
How Hepatitis C Is NOT Spread?

- Sneezing or coughing
- Shaking hands
- Hugging and kissing
- Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses
- Swimming in a public swimming pool
- Being bit by a mosquito
- Sitting on a public toilet seat
- Through spit, urine or poop when blood is **not** present

How is Hepatitis C Diagnosed?

- Hepatitis C is diagnosed through blood tests
- When coming in for a hep C blood test, you should talk to your nurse about getting other tests like HIV
- Someone could have hep C and not show any symptoms. It may take years to show symptoms. Even without symptoms hepatitis C can be damaging your body
- If you think you have ever been at risk, ask to be tested

Progression of Hepatitis C in Sandy Lake



How Can We Decrease Hepatitis C in Our Community?

- Education to:
 - Build awareness in the community
 - Increase knowledge of hep C
 - Pass the message to others
- Health promotion to encourage:
 - Healthy lifestyle choices
 - Drug use prevention
 - Safe practices

Education & Health Promotion in Sandy Lake

- Provide education sessions for youth (in the high school, community groups)
- Provide hepatitis C education to education staff
- Provide education sessions over the radio Wednesdays 4pm-5pm
- Promote safety, especially around Earth Day's community clean up on May 20th
- Provide information as needed via the Sandy Lake website

Stop the Spread

The health care providers in collaboration with Chief, Band Council, Elder Council and the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority would like to emphasise that we **do not** encourage recreational drug use. That said drug use is an addiction/disease. We are not here to judge those who are drug users, but instead are concerned for their health as they are loved members of the community. We encourage drug users who are not yet ready to reach out and access our detox programs, to take the first step and access the needle kit program. If we cannot convince you to quit, we encourage you to decrease the risk of harm to yourself and others by using clean supplies and disposing of them properly at the nursing station.

- Patients are encouraged to get clean needles and supplies at the nursing station. It is preferred that kits be picked up between 9am-5pm Monday to Friday but they are available anytime for those who cannot come at those times
- Anyone picking up a kit will be offered testing for hepatitis C (and HIV)
- It is also recommended to get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B

Vaccination

We encourage all members of the community who are in in grade 7 to get their hep B vaccine. Others may also qualify. Ask your nurse. And make sure you get all of the doses needed. Call the Public Health Nurse at 774-3461 for an appointment or ask next time you are in the nursing station.

Why Is This Important?

Hepatitis C is serious. It attacks and damages your liver. You cannot live without a working liver. With education, safe practices, and proper treatment, we can prevent the spread of this disease in Sandy Lake, and help treat those who already have it.

For more information and resources call the Public Health Nurse

Phone: 774-3461

Hours: 9am-5pm Monday-Friday