

Current Health Event

National Hepatitis Awareness Campaign

On the 21st of August, the Ministry of Public Health launched the 2014 National Hepatitis Awareness campaign. The campaign aims to alert people to the spread of hepatitis in Lebanon and to increase the understanding of viral hepatitis in communities in order to reduce transmission and severe disease.

Editorial note:

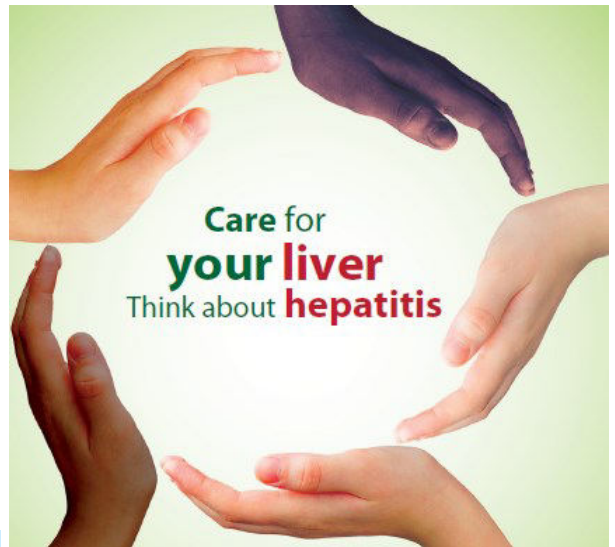
Increased understanding and education among the local community is an essential first step in reducing the significant number of people being newly infected with hepatitis B and C every year as well as delivering the ultimate goal of eradicating these diseases.

Lebanon has put in place good hepatitis prevention and control measures. Hepatitis B vaccination is routinely given to all newborns and it is part of the childhood vaccinations. Health workers are all vaccinated for hepatitis B, too. Recently, in response to increased hepatitis A infections, an awareness campaign was launched to educate people on hygiene. And efforts to ensure safe water supplies are accelerated in particular in those areas most affected by water shortages and hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees. Moreover, treatment for hepatitis B and C is available and the government subsidizes treatment for poor people, based on nationally adapted guidebook developed with WHO support in 2012. It is also to note that the Lebanese MOPH has been very vigilant, along with all the blood banks in the country, in ensuring safe blood transfusion for more than two decades by now.

However, due to the crisis in Syria, a population of much more than one million additional people is in need of hepatitis prevention and control measures including vaccination, hygiene, infection control, safe blood transfusions, early diagnosis and treatment. This requires utmost commitment and support from all actors and partners involved.

Symptoms of viral hepatitis often go unnoticed. It can cause both acute and chronic liver disease; ranging in severity from a mild illness to a serious, life-long illness, or even liver cancer. It often causes no symptoms until there is irreversible liver damage.

In line with the national hepatitis strategy the Ministry of Health announces that hepatitis B vaccination will be made available to non-governmental organizations providing services for populations at high risk of hepatitis transmission, such as people who inject drugs and men who have sex with men. WHO guidelines for hepatitis do strongly recommend this intervention, since it will fill gaps in vaccination coverage among people who are at very high risk and thus reduce disease burden.



On this occasion WHO acting representative Dr. Gabriele Riedner proposed that government, NGOs, physicians and the pharmaceutical industry work together to make the new effective treatments for chronic hepatitis C available and affordable to patients in Lebanon, as the price for these medicines has been prohibitively high. Achieving affordable treatment will require a very good strategy.

Cumulative Notifiable diseases in Lebanon (Syrian)

Disease	2013 Cumul	2014 Cumul*	Jul	Aug
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Acute Flaccid Paralysis	34(7)	23(9)	3(0)	0(0)
Measles	1760(232)	218(92)	10(9)	0(0)
Mumps	14(2)	307(51)	22(12)	2(0)
Pertussis	59(9)	52(16)	7(2)	3(0)
Rabies	1(1)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Rubella	27(1)	12(7)	1(1)	0(0)
Tetanus	4(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Viral Hep B	141(8)	130(18)	10(4)	4(0)
Water/Food Borne Diseases				
Brucellosis	189(12)	162(24)	28(5)	3(0)
Cholera	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Hydatid cyst	13(3)	11(1)	1(0)	0(0)
Typhoid Fever	407(21)	122(8)	16(1)	5(0)
Viral Hep A	1551(220)	795(132)	88(12)	5(0)
Other Diseases				
Leishmaniasis	1033(1032)	391(387)	28(28)	0(0)
Meningitis	204(24)	113(13)	6(2)	0(0)
Viral Hep C	103(4)	56(1)	12(0)	2(0)

Source: Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon