

ECHO NEWS

Courtenay council challenged to get tested for Hepatitis C

AIDS Vancouver Island to hold free clinic on World Hepatitis Day on July 28

BY MICHAEL BRIONES
Echo Staff

AIDS Vancouver Island has challenged the leaders of the City of Courtenay to take the lead to get tested for Hepatitis C.

Sarah Sullivan, manager of AIDS Vancouver Island, threw the dare at Courtenay council as part of the celebration of World Hepatitis Day on July 28. It is also aimed at inspiring baby boomers and others to follow.

In partnership with Public Health in Courtenay, they will be setting up a Hepatitis C testing station for local politicians and First Nations leaders from 1 to 3 p.m. at its office on 355 6th Street.

Hepatitis C is a serious and often deadly disease caused by a virus that

attacks one of the most important organs of the body - the liver. Over time, it can cause liver cancer.

It can spread by contact with infected blood and items that have infected blood on them such as non-sterile needles.

Sullivan said anyone can get Hep C. It is believed the majority of people with this disease are baby boomers, adults born between 1945 and 1970. It's not certain why but Sullivan explained it could be due to modern procedures to prevent blood exposure starting only in the 1980s.

Wide-spread screening of blood supplies was adopted only in 1992 and this means some baby boomers may have been exposed to infected blood during transfusions and medical procedures. Others could have been infected

through unsterile piercings or tattoos, or from injecting drugs.

In Canada, it's estimated around 220,000 people may be infected with Hep C and one in five may not know they are infected.

That's because the symptoms are not known until the liver is already damaged. This can take 20 years or more to happen. And because of this, people without realizing it can spread Hep C to other.

Sullivan told council that even if you don't have the symptoms, it's best to get tested for Hep C. A simple, free blood test can show whether or not you have the virus.

Sullivan plans to also make the same challenge to Comox and Cumberland councils as well as the Comox Valley Regional District.