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Conference Addresses Growing Concern of Viral Hepatitis
HIV, Addiction Also Main Points of Discussion

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 26, 2016) – The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) hosted the Viral Hepatitis Conference on Tuesday, July 26 to bring together community-based organizations, local, state and federal agencies to educate, share resources and information surrounding this growing health concern.

Hepatitis, infection of the liver, is typically caused by viruses such as Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C. It is a significant health concern in Kentucky, which has the highest rates of Hepatitis C infection in the country.

“Kentucky’s substance abuse problem and high rate of Hepatitis C are tremendous health concerns, but these problems are not unique to the Commonwealth,” said Health and Family Services Cabinet Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson. “This conference served as a tremendous opportunity to bring together experts from other states as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to learn more about what is going on in our communities and effective strategies for preventing outbreaks.”

The conference was held at the Embassy Suites in Lexington. Over 300 people were in attendance. Topics included HIV/Hepatitis C outbreak vulnerability in Appalachia; implementation of Louisville’s syringe exchange program; treatment access for Hepatitis C; and regional data on addiction and treatment, among other issues related to viral hepatitis.

Dr. Ardis Hoven, infectious disease specialist with DPH, moderated the event, and additional staff from public health’s hepatitis, HIV/AIDS and immunizations programs served as exhibitors.

“Hepatitis C is one of the deadliest chronic diseases in the U.S.,” said Dr. Hoven. “The truth is we need more screening, testing and treatment so that people are properly diagnosed and are not unknowingly spreading the virus to others. Making sure these services are in place and accessible to the populations that need them is a public health challenge. That is why it is so important to bring together leaders to work together on this problem.”

Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. Today, most people become infected with the Hepatitis C virus by sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs.

According to CDC, the impact of Hepatitis C is tremendous. Of every 100 people infected with the Hepatitis C virus, about:

- 75–85 people will develop chronic Hepatitis C virus infection; of those,
- 60–70 people will go on to develop chronic liver disease
- 5–20 people will go on to develop cirrhosis over a period of 20–30 years
- 1–5 people will die from cirrhosis or liver cancer

More information about viral hepatitis can be found at the [CDC](#).

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.