

World Hemophilia Day promotes hepatitis A and B vaccination

Montreal 14 April: *Get vaccinated – prevent hepatitis A and B* is the theme of the 2005 World Hemophilia Day, on April 17.

On the day, the World Federation of Hemophilia (WFH) along with hemophilia organizations and treatment centres in more than 100 countries will organize activities to raise awareness of the need for vaccination and other issues affecting the hemophilia community.

“We’re promoting vaccination this year because hepatitis A and B pose higher risks for people with hemophilia,” says Dr Paul Giangrande, WFH Vice President Medical.

“Hepatitis A and B infect a person’s liver and the WFH recommends vaccination as a safe and effective way to avoid these diseases. Everyone who uses blood products, as well as those who administer them, should *get vaccinated* against hepatitis A and B, if they don't already have immunity.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 350 million people have lifelong infections of hepatitis B, which it defines as “one of the major diseases of mankind and a serious global health problem.” According to WHO, the risk of death from hepatitis B-related liver cancer or cirrhosis is approximately 25 per cent for people who were chronically infected during childhood. In many countries, up to 15 per cent of children were chronically infected with hepatitis B. WHO has found that widespread vaccinations since 1982 have reduced that rate to less than one per cent amongst immunized groups of children.

“However, many countries still lack a national immunization program,” says Mark Skinner, president of the WFH. “World Hemophilia Day offers the global hemophilia community an excellent opportunity to create public awareness about the importance of immunization programs to everyone, along with the need for improved diagnosis and care of people with hemophilia.

Michael Mathews, vice president of Bayer BP Global Marketing, reinforced Bayer BP’s commitment as a sponsor of World Hemophilia Day. “Bayer BP is pleased to be a sponsor of World Hemophilia Day to help raise awareness for improved treatment worldwide.”

World Hemophilia Day was started by the WFH in 1989. The date April 17 was chosen in honour of WFH founder Frank Schnabel, who was born on that day.

The WFH is an international, not-for-profit organization committed to improving treatment and care for people with hemophilia and related bleeding disorders. The bleeding disorder affects an estimated 400,000 people worldwide, yet some 75 per cent of them remain undiagnosed and untreated.

“With treatment, a person with hemophilia can expect to live a long, healthy life with few restrictions,” says Giangrande. “Without treatment, our members face continual pain, disability, isolation, and premature death. According to WFH data, most people with severe hemophilia, who do not receive treatment, die before the age of 19.”

For photographs and further information contact:

Richard Andrews, Communications Officer, World Federation of Hemophilia
1425 René Lévesque Boulevard West #1010, Montréal, Québec H3G 1T7 Canada
Tel: +1 (514) 394-2822, Fax: +1 (514) 875-8916
Email: randrews@wfh.org, Web site: www.wfh.org