

LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR LIVER:

An expert focus on HEPATITIS

What is hepatitis?

- ▶ Acute and chronic hepatitis are the **most common liver diseases** – viral hepatitis alone now affects 1 in 12 people worldwide
- ▶ The diseases are characterised by an **acute or chronic inflammation of the liver** and are mainly caused by **viral infections**, although there are also **non-viral forms** of the disease
- ▶ Chronic hepatitis can lead to **liver fibrosis, cirrhosis, liver failure and death**

Who is at risk?

Acute and chronic hepatitis vary in the way in which they are contracted and the type of diseases that they can cause:

- ▶ **Viral Hepatitis A and E** are spread through contaminated water and food and are more common in developing countries. They cause an acute condition from which one can completely recover but which can also be fatal
- ▶ **Viral Hepatitis B, C and D** are spread by exposure to contaminated blood, through transfusion, drug injection, tattooing or piercing and, mainly for hepatitis B/D, sexual intercourse. They may cause an acute or chronic condition.
- ▶ A large number of individuals are **unaware that they are carrying** the hepatitis B or C virus
- ▶ **Non-viral forms** of acute and chronic hepatitis are also now increasing due to alcohol abuse, unhealthy diets and drug use, which can cause substantial and sometimes irreversible liver damage

Can it be prevented?

There are several ways in which to reduce the risk of developing acute and chronic hepatitis and their complications:

- ▶ **Get tested** – to check the blood for viral hepatitis and other liver functions
- ▶ **Get vaccinated** – to be protected against some of the viral forms of hepatitis (hepatitis A and B)
- ▶ **Practice safe sex** – use condoms to reduce the risk of contracting hepatitis B and C
- ▶ **Avoid drugs** – to avoid contracting viral hepatitis through infected needles and to protect the liver from toxins
- ▶ **Consume alcohol responsibly** – to prevent unnecessary harm to the liver
- ▶ **Maintain a healthy diet** – to avoid developing non-alcoholic fatty liver disease-related hepatitis
- ▶ **Talk to a doctor** - to assess the level of risk of contracting hepatitis or other liver diseases

Political action on hepatitis

Scientists and medical professionals involved in liver disease across Europe call on EU and national decision makers to:

- ▶ Recognise acute and chronic hepatitis, including viral hepatitis, as an urgent health priority to be addressed through comprehensive EU and national strategies
- ▶ Set up a monitoring, reporting and surveillance system for viral hepatitis at national and European level
- ▶ Implement cost-effective public awareness campaigns and primary prevention measures to reduce the incidence and prevalence of acute and chronic hepatitis
- ▶ Develop and implement national vaccination programmes for viral hepatitis
- ▶ Introduce targeted screening programmes for viral hepatitis to ensure early diagnosis and wider access to treatment and care and to prevent complications
- ▶ Tackle the determinants of non-viral forms of hepatitis e.g. by promoting healthy diets and combating alcohol abuse
- ▶ Support EU funded research on viral hepatitis as the fourth major communicable and poverty-related disease alongside HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria
- ▶ Commit to working in partnership with patient groups and healthcare professional organisations in the development of hepatitis policies and the exchange of best practice

About the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)

EASL is the leading professional association of medical professionals dedicated to promoting liver research

Through its work, EASL aims to promote education of physicians, scientists and public awareness on liver diseases and their management

EASL fosters European multi-center controlled trials and facilitates scientific exchange in the area of liver disease

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