

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Hepatitis C Rates Continue to Rise**

*World Hepatitis Day is July 28<sup>th</sup>*

**Eau Claire, WI, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018** – About 90,000 people in Wisconsin have hepatitis C and less than half know it. World Hepatitis Day is a reminder to talk to your doctor, know your risks, and get tested to stay healthy.

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. It is spread through the blood of a person who already has hepatitis C. The number of confirmed cases of hepatitis C reported in Eau Claire County increased from 37 in 2016 to 39 in 2017. Over the past five years, the rate of acute hepatitis C cases in Wisconsin has increased by 143% (Wisconsin Department of Health Services).

**Who's most at risk for hepatitis C?**

- *Baby boomers (people born 1945 to 1965).* Many baby boomers have been living with the infection for years without knowing it.
- *Young adults with a history of injection drug use.* We are seeing the greatest increase of new infections among young people with a history of injection drug use and sharing drug use equipment like needles, cottons, water or cookers increases the risk of getting the illness.

*According to research, the virus can stay infectious on surfaces outside of the body at room temperature for up to 6 weeks.* Hepatitis C is dangerous because it often does not show symptoms. Once diagnosed, it can be treated and cured. Without treatment, hepatitis C can lead to serious liver problems, including cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) or liver cancer. More people die from hepatitis C than all of the other 60 reportable infectious diseases combined.

**The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested!** Talk with your doctor and get tested. The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin provides free and confidential hepatitis C testing for those at-risk including: veterans, baby boomers, and those with a history of injection drug use.

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