

Center offers Hepatitis B vaccine

The Hepatitis B virus can be transmitted through sexual conduct and the use of needles

By Kari Thorene
Higher Education Reporter

"The Hepatitis B virus is 10 times more common and 10 times more transmittable than HIV," said Gerald Fleischli, director of the University Student Health Center.

Hepatitis B can cause of a range of liver problems, including liver failure and liver cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 140,000 and 320,000 persons are infected annually in the United States; between 70,000 and 160,000 develop symptoms of the infection.

Hepatitis B is directly responsible for 140 to 320 deaths per year and contributes to 5,000 and 6,000 deaths from chronic liver disease per year, according to the CDC.

"The tragedy is it is completely preventable," Fleischli said.

While a vaccine for the virus has been available since 1982, many University students haven't been immunized, Fleischli said.

"Hepatitis B is transmitted just like HIV — through sexual contact and IV [intravenous] drug use," Fleischli said.

Symptoms for Hepatitis B infection include jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, intermittent nausea and vomiting.

The CDC recommends that everyone get immunized, Fleischli said, because the organization found that only targeting high-risk groups didn't significantly affect incidence of infection. The CDC recommends that all babies get their first shot while still in the hospital.

For the immunization, a person needs three shots in a sequence that lasts for months, Fleischli said.

Students who haven't been immunized can get the shots at the health center, Fleischli said. And if they are under 18-years-old, students can get vaccinated for a greatly reduced cost.

"The federal government has given a grant to the state under the Vaccines for Children program," Fleischli said. "Under that, Hepatitis B immunization is free, except maybe for an administrative charge."

For students who qualify for free immunization under the program, the health center administrative charge is \$6 a shot. The cost for those who don't qualify is \$40 per shot.

The federal government does not subsidize any shots after a student's 19th birthday, so if the

Hepatitis B

■ **WHAT:** The Hepatitis B virus, which can cause chronic liver disease and primary liver cancer

■ **AT RISK:** Primarily sexually active people and intravenous drug users; also infants born to infected mothers, health care workers, Hemodialysis patients

■ **TRANSMISSION:** Hepatitis B is blood borne like the HIV virus. It can be transmitted through sexual contact, shared needles for intravenous drug users and perinatally (from mother to newborn)

■ **PREVENTION:** Three-shot vaccination over a period of months

SOURCE: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Hepatitis B fact sheet

student turns 19 during the immunization sequence (for example, the birthday comes between the second and third shot), the student has to pay the full \$40 for the next shot.

However, the health center has received state funds to subsidize students until age 20, Fleischli said. Therefore, students can get Hepatitis B immunization for \$6 a shot at the health center right up to their 20th birthday. After that, each shot will cost \$40, even if the student started the sequence before turning 20.

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