



Embargoed for release until:
Monday, October 23, 2006

Contact:
Anne-Louise Oliphant, ACG
mediaonly@acg.gi.org
Rosanne Riesenman
301-263-9000

75 Percent of College Students Report Risk Factors for Hepatitis C
Lack of Knowledge and Screening Opportunities Increase Risk

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, October 23, 2006 – College undergraduates in the United States do not recognize the magnitude of their risk behaviors for contracting Hepatitis C, according to a survey conducted at a large midwestern university. Researchers found that 75 percent of undergraduates in this study had a potential Hepatitis C risk factor, from tattoos to sharing body jewelry. Results of this study were presented at the 71st Annual Scientific Meeting of the American College of Gastroenterology in Las Vegas.

Researchers surveyed 610 college undergraduates on their knowledge of Hepatitis C and their personal experience with traditional (intravenous drug use, blood transfusions) and novel risk factors (sharing of body jewelry, tattoos). Twenty-seven percent didn't know Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) could be spread through intravenous drug use, while 77 percent of students were unaware HCV could be transmitted by intranasal cocaine use. Furthermore, 53 percent of students reported sharing pierced jewelry.

“We were surprised by the proportion of undergraduates who were inadvertently putting themselves at risk for Hepatitis C,” says Thomas Shehab, M.D. of St. Joseph Mercy Health System and Huron Gastro. “In addition to well documented traditional risk factors, we are concerned about students who may be putting themselves at risk for this serious disease with even something as simple as sharing pierced body jewelry. “

One of the other concerning findings was the low frequency that the undergraduates were asked about viral hepatitis/HIV risk factors when seen by their primary care providers. “The majority of the group had been to the physician for a health care maintenance examination in the last three years, but during that visit most had never been asked about behaviors that put them at risk for serious infection,” says Dr. Shehab. Given the prevalence of these behaviors, researchers say further study should focus on this high-risk age group.

About Hepatitis C Virus

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The infection is spread by blood-to-blood contact with an infected person. HCV can be spread through contaminated needles, unsterilized tattoo or body piercing equipment, and shared toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers or other hygiene items that have HCV-infected blood on them. There is no vaccine against HCV. Serious complications include chronic liver disease, cirrhosis, and liver cancer.

About the American College of Gastroenterology

The ACG was formed in 1932 to advance the scientific study and medical treatment of disorders of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. The College promotes the highest standards in medical education and is guided by its commitment to meeting the needs of clinical gastroenterology practitioners. Consumers can get more information on GI diseases through the following ACG-sponsored programs:

- 1-800-978-7666 (free brochures on common GI disorders, including ulcer, colon cancer, gallstones, and liver disease)
- 1-866-IBS-RELIEF and www.ibsrelief.org (free educational materials)
- 1-800-HRT-BURN (free brochure and video on heartburn and GERD)
- www.acg.gi.org (ACG’s Web site)

###