

Dubai-based doctor urges people to get early screening for Hepatitis B

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Dubai: The stigma attached to the transmission of hepatitis B, a viral disease attacking the liver, is holding back many people not to get themselves tested early, a senior doctor warned, calling for an urgent awareness campaign.

About 3 per cent of the UAE population, or about 135,000 people are affected by the deadly virus, said Dr Adnan Abuhammour, president of the Emirates Gastroenterology Society, yesterday, announcing the World Hepatitis Day set for Tuesday (May 19).

He said hepatitis B virus is 100 times more infectious than HIV, the virus that causes Aids, and is a huge burden on the economy. He said a dirham of prevention is important as the virus ultimately attacks the liver and the only hope in the later stages is a liver transplant which costs \$500,000 (about Dh 1.8 million).

Hepatitis B can be transmitted during unprotected sex, through intravenous drug use and needle sharing, and from mother to child during pregnancy.

The earlier in life a person becomes infected with Hepatitis B, the greater the likelihood of infection becoming chronic, the doctor said. "About 100 million face death due to complications (from this disease)," he said.

The virus replicates with a high rate of mutation and drugs which worked well in keeping down the viral copying, may have no effect on the mutated virus.

Al Ain Sports and Cultural Club CEO Dr Khalid Mohammad Abdullah, said that while Hepatitis B is not a pandemic it will urge its huge fan base to push forward the idea to the youth to seek early screening.

Diagnosis: Facts and figures

- One in 12 people worldwide are living with either chronic hepatitis B or C and are unaware of their infection
- There is no cure, but there are treatments that can manage the disease
- Being pregnant and infected, the virus poses a serious risk to the baby
- The virus is transmitted through blood, bodily fluids or unsterilised needles.

(Gulf News)