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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dickinson-Iron District Health Department Recommends Baby Boomers Get Tested for Hepatitis C May is Hepatitis Awareness Month

Kingsford and Iron River, MI, May 2014 - Hepatitis C is a serious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C has been called a silent epidemic because most people with Hepatitis C do not know they are infected.

While some people who get infected with Hepatitis C are able to clear, or get rid of the virus, most people who get infected develop a chronic or lifelong infection. Over time, chronic Hepatitis C can lead to serious liver problems including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer, but many people can benefit from available treatment options that can eliminate the virus from the body and prevent further liver damage.

In 2012, CDC started recommending Hepatitis C testing for everyone born from 1945 – 1965, the baby boomers. While anyone can get Hepatitis C, up to 75% of adults infected with Hepatitis C were born from 1945 – 1965.

Most people with Hepatitis C don't know they are infected so getting tested is the only way to know.

- Baby boomers are five times more likely to have Hepatitis C than other adults.
- The longer people live with Hepatitis C undiagnosed and untreated, the more likely they are to develop serious, life-threatening liver disease.
- Liver disease, liver cancer, and deaths from Hepatitis C are on the rise.
- Getting tested can help people learn if they are infected and get them into lifesaving care and treatment.

The reason that baby boomers have high rates of Hepatitis C is not completely understood. Most boomers are believed to have become infected in the 1970's and 1980's when rates of Hepatitis C were the highest.

Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through multiple ways.

Before widespread screening of the blood supply for Hepatitis C began in 1992, Hepatitis C was spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants. People with clotting problems who took blood products prior to 1987 could have been exposed to Hepatitis C. Sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs was and is a very efficient way to transmit the virus. People have also become infected with the Hepatitis C virus from body piercing or tattoos that were done in prisons, homes, or in other unlicensed or informal facilities.

Although uncommon, outbreaks of Hepatitis C have occurred from poor infection control in health care settings. In rare cases, Hepatitis C may be sexually transmitted. Babies born to mothers with Hepatitis C can get infected during childbirth. Still, many people do not know how or when they were infected.

Hepatitis C is **not** spread by casual contact, kissing, hugging, sneezing, coughing, breastfeeding or sharing food, eating utensils or glasses.

Many people with chronic Hepatitis C do not have symptoms and **do not** know they are infected. People with chronic Hepatitis C can live for decades without symptoms or feeling sick.

When symptoms do appear, they often are a sign of advanced liver disease. symptoms of Hepatitis C can include: fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, grey-colored stools, joint pain and/or jaundice. The only way to know if someone has Hepatitis C is to get tested.

Medications, called antivirals, can be used to treat many people with chronic Hepatitis C. However, not everyone needs or can benefit from treatment. It is important to be checked by a doctor experienced in treating chronic Hepatitis C. He or she can determine the most appropriate medical care.

For a fact sheet on living with Chronic Hepatitis C, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HCV/PDFs/HepCLivingWithChronic.pdf>.

The Dickinson-Iron District Health Department offers **confidential testing for Hepatitis C**. If you would like to get tested or have questions, please call the Health Department at 774-1868 or 265-9913.

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