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**RE: World Hepatitis Day 2023**

World Hepatitis Day is observed on July 28 every year, to raise awareness of viral hepatitis which causes inflammation of the liver that leads to severe disease and liver cancer. This year's theme is *We're Not Waiting*. Every 30 seconds someone in the world dies from hepatitis. The World Health Organization aims to achieve hepatitis elimination by 2030. Public Health officials across Canada have been working hard to reach this goal.

In Saskatchewan First Nations communities, efforts concentrate on the B and C strains which are most prevalent. Last year, the number of tests done for the most common strain, Hepatitis C (Hep C), was four times what it was five years ago. The good news is that the positivity rate has continued to decrease and was less than 2% last year. However, when compared to the overall Saskatchewan and Canada rates in 2020, the rate of hepatitis C in First Nations communities was over two and four times higher, respectively. Also worrying is that a quarter of newly diagnosed HIV cases are co-infected with hepatitis C. This points to needle sharing as the mode of transmission.

For hepatitis B, the trend is better because most individuals are vaccinated as a part of routine school immunization programs. Roughly two-thirds of students have completed the series. The impact of this high vaccination rate is shown in the numbers of cases which has averaged less than one case a year for the last five years.

Clearly there is still work to do. It is important that we continue to vaccinate students and catch up with those who may have missed out because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Remind families and friends to get tested for hepatitis and update their immunizations. We must expand our harm reduction efforts to make injection drug use safer. We need to continue our public education efforts about all strains of hepatitis and remain committed to eliminating viral hepatitis in our First Nation communities.

Stay safe and healthy,

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