Viral hepatitis is a serious health problem in the country, IMA

- If not diagnosed in time, it can lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer
- About 90% of hepatitis C cases can be cured with treatment

New Delhi, 26 July 2017: According to statistics, about 400 million people are infected with Hepatitis B and C around the world. In India, about 40 million people are chronically infected with Hepatitis B and another 6 to 12 million with Hepatitis C. Most of the acute cases of liver failure can be attributed to Hepatitis E Virus (HEV). As per the IMA, about 90% of the people with Hepatitis C can be cured with treatment.

An inflammation of liver is referred to as hepatitis. Caused by hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D, and E, viral hepatitis is a widespread infectious disease. The condition can be self-limiting or can progress to liver fibrosis (scarring), cirrhosis or liver cancer. Viral hepatitis has been recognized as a serious health problem in India.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "Hepatitis A virus is the most common cause of acute viral hepatitis, followed by hepatitis B virus. Engaging in certain activities, such as getting a tattoo or body piercing, sharing needles to inject drugs, or having several sex partners, increases the risk of developing hepatitis. The liver is a vital organ which helps process nutrients, filter blood, and fight infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Hepatitis B can also be transmitted by fomites such as such as finger-stick devices used to obtain blood for glucose measurements, multi-dose medication vials, jet gun injectors, and endoscopes. Hepatitis B is 10 times more infectious than HCV and 50–100 times more infectious than HIV. The HBV can survive in dried blood for up to 7 days and remains capable of causing infection. This makes hepatitis B a more dangerous infection than HIV.”

Some symptoms of acute viral hepatitis include fatigue, flu-like symptoms, dark urine, light-colored stools, fever, and jaundice; however, acute viral hepatitis can also occur with minimal symptoms which can go unrecognized. In rare cases, acute viral hepatitis causes fulminant hepatic failure.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “The initial treatment for acute viral hepatitis involves relieving the symptoms of nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain. It is better to avoid medications or compounds, which can have adverse effects in patients with abnormal liver function. Only
necessary medication should be prescribed as the impaired liver cannot eliminate drugs normally, making them accumulate in the blood and reach toxic levels.”

The following tips can help in preventing hepatitis.

**Get vaccinated** Hepatitis A and B vaccines are very effective and can be given as separate injections, or combined. It is better to consult your doctor and get vaccinated on time to avoid any infection.

**Inculcate the habit of washing hands** Make sure that everyone in the family washes hands thoroughly after using the bathroom (or changing a diaper) and before handling food or eating.

**Avoid contact with foreign blood** Any blood exposure can transmit hepatitis B and C and therefore, ensure to wash off any blood thoroughly if you happen to come in contact with it.

**Beware of the tattoo** Get tattooed only by a licensed professional. It is possible to get hepatitis from hypodermic needles and the tools used to create tattoos and piercings.

**Indulge in safe sex** Use appropriate contraception options. The chances of hepatitis infection increase with the number of sexual partners.

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**About IMA:** Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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