**GENEVA, 25 July 2012 –** Under the **World Hepatitis Day** theme *"It's closer than you think"*, the World Health Organization (WHO) is urging governments to strengthen efforts to fight viral hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver that kills about 1 million people every year. In addition, an estimated 500 million people experience chronic illness from their infection with hepatitis; it is a major cause of liver cancer and liver cirrhosis.

"The vast majority of people infected with hepatitis are unaware, undiagnosed and untreated," says Dr Sylvie Briand of WHO's Pandemic and Epidemic Disease Department. "Only by increasing awareness of the different forms of hepatitis, and how they can be prevented and treated, can we take the first step towards full control of the disease and save thousands of lives."

**Types of hepatitis**

There are five hepatitis viruses defined by types – type A, B, C, D and E. Types B and C are of significant concern since a high proportion of people infected with these viruses may not experience symptoms at the early stage of the disease, and only become aware of their infection when they are chronically ill. This can sometimes be decades after infection. In addition, these two viruses are the leading cause of liver cirrhosis and cancer, accounting for almost 80% of all liver cancer cases.

People can get hepatitis from either infected bodily fluids or contaminated food and water depending on the type of hepatitis.

- Types B, C and D are contracted through the blood of an infected person (e.g. through unsafe injections or unscreened blood transfusions) and in the case of hepatitis B and C, also through unprotected sex.
- Type D only infects persons who are already infected with type B.
- Types A and E are typically transmitted via contaminated water or food and closely associated with poor sanitation and poor personal hygiene (e.g. unwashed hands).

Effective vaccines are available for all the virus types, except C.

Given the scale of the epidemic - with 1 in 12 people infected - and recent advances in prevention and treatment, the World Health Assembly in 2010 designated 28 July as World Hepatitis Day. The Day serves to promote greater understanding of hepatitis as a global public health problem and to stimulate the strengthening of preventive and control measures against infection in countries throughout the world.

**New framework**

In preparation for this year's World Hepatitis Day, WHO is launching a new global framework to tackle the disease. The *Prevention and control of viral hepatitis infection: Framework for global action* describes four areas of work to prevent and treat hepatitis infection.

Raising awareness, together with promoting partnerships and mobilizing resources constitute the first of the four priorities in WHO's new framework. The others are: transforming scientific evidence into policy and action; preventing transmission; and screening, care and treatment.

WHO will work with its Member States and partners on all four priority areas of the framework to help expand access to prevention, care and treatment programmes to people who need it. The framework will guide the development of regional and country-specific strategies to combat hepatitis.

To access the report: WHO Prevention and control of viral hepatitis infection: Framework for global action: www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/Framework/en/index.html

WHO World Hepatitis Day 2012 information: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/world_hepatitis_day/en/index.html