

Getting Shot(s): R.U.1.2? Hosts Free Hepatitis Vaccination

By CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN & SERGIO CORRALES

The Vermont Department of Health, in conjunction with R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center, will be offering free Hepatitis vaccinations at the Center at 34 Elmwood Avenue in Burlington starting with a clinic on September 9, 4:00-8:00 pm. Vaccination is given with a series of injections, and to make it fully effective participants must come back one month after the first shot and again six months later.

The second series of injections will be given on October 14 from 4:00pm to 8:00pm. People may also start the first series in October if they miss the September clinic. If demand warrants, the Health

Department may continue to offer monthly clinics at the Center for the foreseeable future.

Hepatitis is a virus that causes disease in the liver. The liver is a major organ that processes all the foods, chemicals & medicines that we ingest. There are 7 identified strains of hepatitis: A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. Hepatitis A, B, and C are more commonly treated. Hepatitis A&B are preventable through vaccine. There is no cure and no vaccine for Hepatitis C. Hepatitis is the leading cause of chronic liver disease in the world.

Do You Know Hep ABC?

Hepatitis A (HAV) is found in the

feces of an infected person. It is easily spread through household contact or sexual activity with an infected person. Persons who engage in anal-oral sexual activity (rimming) are at greater risk.

Hepatitis B (HBV) is found in the blood or semen of infected men. It is spread through sexual activity.

Hepatitis C (HCV) is spread through the exchange of blood from one human to another. It can occur through needle and needle-drug use, transfusion exposure, exposure to medical instruments through glove punctures, or through sexual contact with an infected partner – who may not know he or she is infected. Hepatitis C is referred to as the silent

epidemic since it can progress slowly over many years. Most people are not aware of any noticeable symptoms for along time. Once the blood becomes infected, the level of disease in the liver progresses differently for each individual.

Once an individual becomes infected with Hepatitis, symptoms such as joint pain, nausea, fever, loss of appetite, extreme tiredness, headache, yellow skin, dark urine, yellow eyes or a bloated stomach may force him or her to visit a healthcare provider. Only a medical provider can diagnose Hepatitis and suggest a course of treatment. The rigors of treatment and the results of neglect are severe. But there is as yet no vaccine for HCV.

Get Hep Prevention

The Hep A & B vaccination clinic is free for individuals screened as being at risk. Normally, hepatitis vaccinations are available only at a significant cost to the patient, sometimes up

to \$200. The cost of the vaccination is rarely covered by insurance companies.

The Vermont Department of Health is making the vaccine available to gay and bisexual men who are sexually active, and to others at high risk of contracting the virus, including injection drug users. Most lesbian and bisexual women are not considered at high risk for infection with the virus. But women with high numbers of sexual partners, or whose sexual partners have risk factors – such as intravenous drug use or oral-anal sex – should be screened.

Hepatitis A & B are easily vaccine-preventable by completing the vaccine series at the free clinic at R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center. Appointments are available or you can just drop in on the night of the clinic. Call 802.860.7812. ▼

Montpelier Kids Need Mentors

There are kids on waiting lists who need an adult friend, a mentor, someone willing to spend at least two hours once a week with them, having fun and hanging out – you know, just being there.

These particular 9- to 14-year-old kids live in the Montpelier area, and as of mid-August, there were 5 girls and 3 boys on a waiting list at Girls/Boyz First!! Program coordinator

Wendy Farber says she hasn't done any outreach yet, and still there's that waiting list in addition to the 25 sets of paired kids and mentors already enjoying each other's company.

It's not so much that she's got lgbt kids to pair with queer adults, she says, but that she needs adults who either don't have kids of their own or whose kids have grown and gone. The kids come from different populations,

so the mentors should too, she indicated. Both mentors and kids are screened, and the mentors receive 3 hours of initial training, with additional support and training offered during monthly meetings. Unlike parents of newborns, mentors also get a manual, though it's more about procedures and policies than parenting.

The Vermont Mentoring Partnership, which supports and works

with 136 mentoring programs statewide, quotes data from a 1995 Big Brothers/Big Sisters study that kids who have mentors are 46 percent less likely to begin using illegal drugs. They're also 53 percent less likely to skip school.

What does a mentor do?

Well, anything that's either free or doesn't cost much: hike, bike, swim, rock-hunt, gardening, crafts, or building stuff for summer and fall; trips to the library, bowling, cross-country skiing, skating, museums, more crafts are

typical for winter and early spring. The mentoring experience is similar to being a Big Brother/Big Sister.

Girls/Boyz First!! is funded by Central Vermont New Directions and The Community Connection using a mix of federal and state funds. Mentors commit to a year with a child. If you're interested, call Wendy Farber at 802-229-4798 or email her at wlsubar@aol.com. ▼



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