

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 16, 2008

Contact:
Office of Minority Health
John West or Blake Crawford
(240) 453-8833

The Office of Minority Health releases strategies to address chronic hepatitis B in Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander communities.

More health education, awareness and screenings, improved access to care and treatment, and increased research are needed to reduce and eventually eliminate chronic hepatitis B among Asian-Americans, Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islander communities (AAs/NHOPIs), a federal report recommends.

The report was created by members of The National Task Force on Hepatitis B Expert Panel, and staff members of HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Office of Minority Health.

Hepatitis B, the world's most common serious viral infection of the liver, can cause premature death from liver disease or liver cancer. Chronic hepatitis B and liver cancer caused by hepatitis B in AAs/NHOPIs comprise one of the most serious but frequently neglected racial and ethnic health disparities in the United States.

"We must find more effective and far-reaching strategies if we are to succeed in reducing the toll hepatitis B takes on our health, well-being and productivity," said Garth Graham, M.D., M.P.H., deputy assistant secretary for minority health. "By calling attention to hepatitis B and creating strategies to fight it, we can take the steps necessary to make a difference in communities that are impacted by this deadly disease."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as two million people in the country are living with chronic hepatitis B, and over half are AAs/NHOPIs. These groups have the highest rates of chronic hepatitis B among all racial/ethnic groups in the United States, and they are at a disproportionately high risk of liver cancer, which is the third leading cause of cancer death among these populations.

"The fight against hepatitis B and associated liver cancer is critical to protect the health of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, who bear the brunt of the disease burden," said John W. Ward, M.D. director of CDC's division of viral hepatitis. "With a new strategic plan developed directly in partnership with communities most affected, we all now have a clear roadmap to move forward in recognizing hepatitis B prevention as a national priority and protecting Asian Americans from the ravages of the disease."

Although the incidence of acute hepatitis B across the United States has declined substantially in recent years, the high prevalence of chronic hepatitis B among AAs/NHOPIs, particularly the foreign-born, appears to have remained relatively constant.

For more information on the report, Goals and Strategies to Address Chronic Hepatitis B, visit <http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlid=190>

#