

## Pinoy Abroad

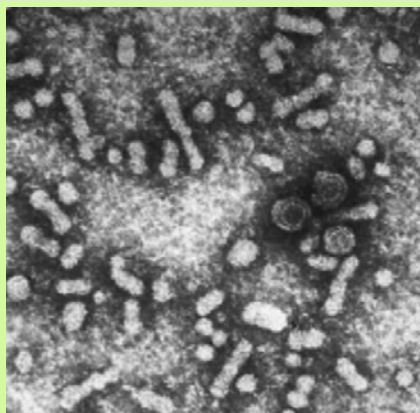
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### Pinoy in California wage battle vs 'silent epidemic'

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#### FIGHTING HEPATITIS B



#### How does hepatitis B spread?

- It is mainly transmitted in three ways: **birth, blood, and sex**
- It is **not** spread through air, food, water, breastfeeding, casual contact, kissing, hugging, coughing, sneezing, and sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses.

#### What do you do about it?

- **Get tested** for the hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg).
- If you are not infected, **get vaccinated** (3 shots over 6 months).

*(The hepatitis B vaccine is 95 percent effective in preventing the infection and its chronic consequences. It is the first vaccine against a major human cancer.)*

- If you are infected, **see your doctor or a liver specialist** for routine monitoring and treatment, if appropriate.
- Help **promote awareness** in your community.

*- taken from the primer on hepatitis B of the Asian Liver Center at Stanford University*

As the world focuses its attention on the A(H1N1) pandemic, Filipinos in California are gearing up to fight hepatitis B, a disease which they fear has become a "silent epidemic."

According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), hepatitis B is "a potentially life-threatening liver

infection caused by the hepatitis B virus."

It said that hepatitis B can cause chronic (long-term) liver disease and puts people at high risk of death from [cirrhosis](#) of the liver and [liver cancer](#), making it "a major global health problem."

It said the disease can also cause an acute illness with symptoms that last several weeks, including yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, extreme fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain.

People can take several months to a year to recover from the symptoms.

Data from the WHO showed that worldwide, an estimated two billion people have been infected with the hepatitis B virus, and more than 350 million have chronic liver infections.

The Asian Liver Center (ALC) at Stanford University in California said that hepatitis B takes about 700,000 lives each year or about one life every 30 seconds.

But what's noticeable, said the ALC, is that over 76 percent of people chronically infected with the virus live in Asia.

It noted that in the Philippines alone, an estimated 16 million people are living with chronic Hepatitis B, making liver cancer the second most common cancer among men.

### **The fight against the "silent epidemic"**

To address this issue, several Filipino communities in California will be partnering with ALC in campaigning against the disease.

"Because there is such a large Filipino population in the county, the ALC is working to develop partnerships with local Filipino organizations so that community members are involved and empowered," Nicole Tantoco, a Stanford undergraduate student and intern at the ALC, told [GMANews.TV](#) in an e-mail.

Tantoco said they will be pushing for the "San Mateo Hep B Free Campaign" which seeks to test and vaccinate all Asian and Pacific Islander residents in the San Mateo County.

The San Mateo County, which includes cities like Daly City, San Bruno, and South San Francisco, is home to over 75,000 Filipinos – a tenth of the county's population.

Because of this, she said they are working at "a more grassroots level" to provide free screenings and educational seminars about hepatitis B at local churches.

"This will bring services and information to the traditionally underserved community," she said.

Once the campaign is up and running this fall, Tantoco said they will finally be able to refer parishioners to local hospitals and clinic for free or low-cost services.

In addition, Tantoco said the ALC and the Philippine Department of Health are currently working together to produce informational brochures to distribute in health clinics and *barangays*. - [GMANews.TV](#)