



**September, 2004**

## **Rising cases of Hepatitis B here noted**

By **JENNY F. MANONGDO**

**arrest rising Hepatitis B cases in the country. About eight to 10 percent of the population have chronic Hepatitis B infection, according to data from the**

Health experts yesterday urged the government to implement and promote a massive immunization program to Philippine Cancer Society.

The Philippines is one of the Asian countries with a high rate of Hepatitis B infection in its population. The group estimates a prevalence rate of eight to 10 percent or roughly eight million Filipinos affected with the virus.

Hepatitis B infection is a major cause of liver cancer where cases are also increasing over the years. One in ten Filipinos have the infection and by next year, the Philippine Cancer Society estimates at least 7,629 new cases of persons with liver cancer as compared to 7,477 cases due to Hepatitis B. But experts said that the disease is fully preventable and future cases may be decreased with a massive immunization program.

"The cost of vaccine for Hepatitis B has decreased. Currently, it is \$3 for the three doses or equivalent to the cost of two pirated DVDs (digital versatile discs)," Prof. Samuel So Director of the liver cancer program of the Stanford University said.

"If this is not treated, two of the eight million will die from liver failure caused by Hepatitis B. Vaccination of the annual two million newborns and the 35 million children under the age of 18 years in the Philippines is critical in protecting the future generations from HBV and liver cancer."

So recommended that newborns be vaccinated against Hepatitis B within the first 12 hours after birth.

But the Health department's resources cannot provide for the vaccination of newborns each year.

The Department of Health (DoH) in 1992 included Hepatitis B vaccination in its Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) under Republic Act 7846 mandating the immunization against Hepatitis B of all Filipino children below eight years of age. But the government was only able to cover 25 percent of the target due to limited resources.

"The vaccine then was so expensive we could not afford it," DoH Secretary Manuel Dayrit said.

The DoH is currently looking into the possibility of importing the vaccine from Korea where it is reportedly cheaper.