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## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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### **State offers hepatitis B shots for high-risk adults**

*Special program available for a limited time*

(Anchorage, AK) — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services is continuing its limited-time program of offering free hepatitis B shots to high-risk adults. The program, which is funded by a special federal grant, covers the cost of the vaccine for the three-shot series. Vaccine is expected to be available into 2010.

Hepatitis B is passed by contact with infected blood and other body fluids. According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hepatitis B affects the liver, causing anything from a mild illness lasting only a few weeks to a serious long-term illness that can lead to liver disease or liver cancer.

Although childhood vaccination against hepatitis B has been a part of the required infant vaccine schedule since 2001, many adults have never received the vaccine. "Vaccine coverage among high-risk adults remains low," said Ginger Provo, the state's adult hepatitis program coordinator. "As a result, the majority of new infections occur in these high-risk groups."

High-risk adults include those who have been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease, those who have multiple sexual partners, men who have sex with men, those with HIV, and those who inject street drugs. The group also can include those who are traveling to Third World countries, those who live or work in correctional or long-term care facilities, those receiving dialysis, and health-care or public safety workers, including all first-responders.

Those interested in receiving the hepatitis B series should contact their local public health center. Although the vaccine is supplied at no cost, an administrative fee may be charged. State public health centers calculate fees based on the patient's ability to pay.

For more information on hepatitis, go to: [www.epi.alaska.gov/id/hepatitis](http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/hepatitis) or <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm>.

For locations of Alaska's public health centers, go to: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/nursing/locations.htm>.

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