

## Media Release

Issued: 13 June 2023

### **Making Rodney Hepatitis C-free**

One free finger prick test could put you on a simple eight-week path to a full cure from a potentially life-threatening condition you might not even know you have.

More than 30,000 people are thought to be living with Hepatitis C (Hep C) in New Zealand and over 200 people die as a result of it each year.

Hep C is an infection that affects the liver and is spread via blood-to-blood contact. Infections can also occur when unsterilised needles are used for piercings, tattoos or injecting drugs

If left untreated, it can be fatal. People at risk are varied and come from all walks of life.

You, or someone you know, could be living with Hepatitis C without knowing it because the symptoms are often very mild - like fatigue or brain fog. The good news is that it is easy to get tested and treated.

There is now a fully-funded and effective oral treatment (Maviret®) with few side-effects that cures most people after only eight weeks. Getting a test is a great way to avoid long-term liver damage. People report feeling less fatigued and healthier after treatment.

“We now have the means to eliminate Hepatitis C from Aotearoa but to do so, we need to find everyone who is living with Hepatitis C. A simple finger-prick test could save your life,” says Professor Ed Gane, a hepatologist at Auckland City Hospital.

From 17-31 July, the Unichem Helensville Pharmacy and Wellsford Pharmacy are aiming to test as many people for Hep C as they can. They can do this through a simple and free finger-prick test which only takes a few minutes. Walk-in and ask about it. You can also ask your GP about getting a Hepatitis C test. If the finger prick test is positive and a blood test confirms the Hep C virus is active, pharmacists can provide the eight-week treatment – also for free.

Both pharmacies are doing the Hep C testing for their communities and to raise awareness of World Hepatitis Day which is on 28 July each year. This day is a call to action where all countries are asked to support the global effort to eliminate viral hepatitis. Each community is asked to do their bit.

Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand Hepatitis C Programme Manager Northern Region Leanne Kirton says the finger prick test and eight-week treatment plan is making a huge difference in the lives of those diagnosed with Hepatitis C.

“One person recently tested at a pharmacy and had no idea they had Hepatitis C. That person had been wondering why they were so tired all the time and is so relieved to know the condition can be treated. This reaction is common; people are usually relieved their Hep C has been found and are amazed at the positive impact treatment can have on their energy and general wellbeing.”

**Ends.**

**Media contact:** Media Line: 09 487 1276