

What's that Big Red thing in St Andrew Square?



Big red C comes to Edinburgh to promote major Hepatitis C campaign

A two metre high red C is on display at St Andrew Square, Edinburgh, today to promote a major new Hepatitis C campaign.

The Big Red C campaign, backed by a national group of hepatitis charities and supported by a number of local NHS Boards, including NHS Lothian, aims to reach out to the estimated 18,000 Scots who are unaware they have contracted Hepatitis C. Although symptoms may not appear for many years, the Hepatitis C virus can cause damage to the liver – potentially leading to cirrhosis, cancer and death.

It is estimated that 38,000 people in Scotland have been diagnosed as Hepatitis C positive of which 4658 have been diagnosed in Lothian.

The campaign slogan – ***Ever injected? Get tested. Hep C – it can be cured*** – is advertised on buses in Edinburgh and highlights the risks for anyone who has ever injected drugs and encourages them to consider getting tested.

The big C will be in various locations across the city in July – St Andrew Square, St Mary's Cathedral and St Giles. Volunteers will be on hand around the C to answer questions from the public.

The campaign's target audience is people who may have used unsterile injecting equipment including people who are currently or who have a history of injecting drug use. This

includes people who injected drugs in the past, perhaps years ago, and people who may have injected drugs once in their life.

The campaign is also raising awareness of the reasons why people should feel motivated to get tested, such as:

- the risk of liver damage caused by Hepatitis C
- the availability of treatments which can cure the majority of cases
- preventing onward transmission of Hepatitis C

Grant Sugden, Chief Executive of Waverley Care, said:- “It is so important that people who think they may have been at risk of contracting Hepatitis C step forward and get tested. Early diagnosis means that people can get treated sooner which can help to prevent long term health problems.”

He added:- “Testing is free and confidential and there is a range of support services in Scotland, including Waverley Care, who can help people through treatment. We understand that a Hepatitis C diagnosis is more than just the medical aspects of the condition. We want people to know there is emotional and practical support out there for them also.”

Leon Wylie, Lead Officer of Hepatitis Scotland – the national lead body for voluntary sector activity on viral hepatitis in Scotland – said: “Hepatitis C is a major health challenge in Scotland. It is vitally important that anyone who has ever injected drugs, even once, accesses testing.

“Up to 15,000 of those 18,000 estimated to be infected are no longer injecting drugs. So people who used or experimented with injecting drugs in the 70s, 80s and 90s – the so-called Baby Boomer and Generation X – may not be aware that they could be carrying the virus. This makes them one of the key target groups for the new campaign.

He added: “You can get tested at your GP or local Sexual

Health Clinic – it is just an easy pin-prick blood test. Hepatitis C can be treated but if not in the long term it can cause life threatening liver problems, including cancer.

[A new website](#), and textback service (text 'hep' to 66644) with easily accessible basic information about Hepatitis C and links to more detailed information such as where to get tested and support services accompanies the campaign.

