What is Hepatitis?
Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver commonly caused by hepatitis virus.

Types of viruses and what they can cause
There are five types of hepatitis viruses: A, B, C, D and E.
These viruses cause acute and chronic infections and liver inflammation, that may lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and, even, death.

Symptoms
Hepatitis may present as acute or chronic infection.

ACUTE INFECTION
Acute infection may present without symptoms or with limited symptoms. Typical symptoms of hepatitis are jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), dark urine, extreme fatigue, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

CHRONIC INFECTION
Chronic infection may lead to cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer. Hepatitis B and C viruses are the main cause of chronic hepatitis in millions of people.

Transmission
- Through ingestion of contaminated food or water. Lack of basic hygiene, such as hand washing before eating or after using the restroom. Hepatitis E can also be transmitted through contaminated blood.
- Through contact with infected blood or sexual contact without protection, including oral one. By receipt of contaminated blood through transfusions, organs transplants, invasive procedures (ex. injection or tattoo with reused needle) and mother to newborn transmission.

Prevention
Preventive measures change depending on the type of hepatitis virus and the routes of transmission. However, an easy way to prevent infection is using basic hygiene rules and safe sex, avoid contact with infected blood and ingestion of contaminated food and water; as well as through vaccination (hepatitis A and B).

28th July
World Hepatitis Day
2002
Health-care workers
Among health-care workers, 65–80% of hepatitis B and 55% of hepatitis C cases were due to needle stick injuries.

2009
Blood bags
+ 99% were screened for markers of hepatitis B and C viruses
+ 78,000 donations were positive for hepatitis B or C viruses

Argentina, Panama and Uruguay have introduced hepatitis A vaccine in their immunization programs. The use of the vaccine is recommended in other countries because the risk of outbreaks and cases is increasing among teenagers and adults.

Hepatitis B virus image, CDC
All countries have officially introduced hepatitis B vaccination in their routine immunization childhood programs.

Between 7 and 9 million adults are estimated to be infected by hepatitis C virus.

Hepatitis D has particular impact in the Amazonian region, especially among indigenous populations.

Little is known about hepatitis E in the region. However, some countries have detected outbreaks and an elevated number of cases in the population.

PAHO key actions
- Establishment of hepatitis national plans and programs in the Americas countries.
- Use of an integrated approach in the fight against hepatitis in the Americas; including prevention, control, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of all hepatitis viruses.
- Commemoration of World Hepatitis Day in the Americas countries.

www.paho.org/hepatitis
Hepatitis B virus image, CDC