

Hepatitis B screening begins in Bristol Bay

State health personnel will be working in the Bristol Bay area during October to provide Hepatitis B screening. Immunization will be offered subsequently in villages showing carrier rates of over 5 percent.

According to team leader Dr. Elizabeth Tower, State Hepatitis B Program Coordinator for the Department of Health and Social Services, a total of nine villages will be visited and assisted by the team during October. Additional visits are scheduled for three villages in November and four in December.

Villages and dates of team visits in October are as follows:

Oct. 8-9 Nondalton
Oct. 10-11 Perryville
Oct. 12-13 Ivanoff Bay
Oct. 17 Portage Creek and Naknek School
Oct. 17&19 New Stuyahok and Koliganek
Oct. 20-21 Togiak-Twin Hills
Oct. 24 Port Heiden

Screenings completed in September in the Bristol Bay villages of Levelock and Ekwok show high incidence rates according to Dr. Tower. Approximately 70 percent of all Levelock residents and 60 percent of Ekwok villagers tested showed the presence of Hepa-

titis B antibodies (only a few Bethel-area villages reporting an 80 percent incidence are known to have a higher rate). The presence of Hepatitis B antibodies indicates the person has had previous contact with the disease and now is either immune or chronically infected (carrier).

In Levelock, 19 percent of those tested were found to be carriers of the disease and fifteen percent of Ekwok's residents are also carriers.

Other area villages recently screened show lower rates. Clark's Point showed no carriers and the incidence rate of antibodies is only 6.5 percent.

Initial screening of 165 Dillingham residents has shown no carriers and evidence that 22 percent have had contact with Hepatitis B in the past and are immune. Additional screening is planned in Dillingham in early December.

Area residents are urged to take advantage of the screening and vaccine program to protect themselves and their children from contracting the disease. Though seldom fatal, Hepatitis B can cause long-term medical problems, includ-

ing liver cancer, kidney failure, non-alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver and inflammation of blood vessels and the heart.

Children under the age of 10 run the highest risk of contracting the disease and becoming carriers if not vaccinated.

Infants born to mothers with the disease have a 90 percent chance of contracting Hepatitis B unless immunized.