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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **HEPATITIS: THE SILENT PANDEMIC**

***More Than 500 Million People Worldwide Are Infected by These Killer Viruses***

May 1, 2006—New York, NY—The threat of avian flu may dominate the media, but its impact on human lives is miniscule compared to the reality of hepatitis B and C, the two most common forms of chronic liver disease. Together, they infect nearly five million people in the United States and, according to a World Health Organization estimate, more than 500 million people around the world.

Without global intervention, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts that the impact of the disease will double over the next ten years.

Yet these viruses, which are one of the *top ten causes of death nationwide*, are often preventable. Although a vaccine is available for hepatitis B, few people are immunized. Fewer still are aware that the vaccine exists.

As for Hepatitis C—considered a “silent killer” because it often produces no symptoms during its long incubation period—there is no vaccine, but infection can be avoided through common-sense precautions such as using sterile needles for tattoos or body piercing, not injecting drugs, and practicing safer sex.

“It is imperative that patients speak with their doctor about getting tested for hepatitis B and C and consider treatment options that will help preserve liver health,” said James L. Boyer, MD, who is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the American Liver Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded 30 years ago in order to promote liver

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health and disease prevention. “Although many people shy away from it, testing can allow for early diagnosis and treatment, preventing the virus from developing into cirrhosis of the liver or cancer.”

“Too often,” Dr. Boyer explained, “people are ashamed to be tested because of long ago drug habits or sexual activities. But shame is a terrible reason for dying an unnecessary and painful death.”

Shame and ignorance go hand in hand, according to Frederick G. Thompson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Liver Foundation. He pointed to a recent survey conducted by the organization, which revealed that half the U.S. population did not even know that hepatitis was a liver disease.

In order to heighten understanding of the illness and its causes, volunteers from the 25 local chapters will present special programs during the month of May for the annual Hepatitis Awareness Month. A key weapon in this year’s Hepatitis Awareness Month is a **Liver Wellness Toolkit**. The kit consists of a professional slide presentation, complete with handouts and instructions, for use by medical and nursing staff, volunteers and healthcare educators. For more information about this presentation, contact the American Liver Foundation at 1-800-GO-LIVER or check out the website at [www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org).

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