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Hepatitis B – the number one reason for crew failing pre-employment medical tests

Dr Balaji of Balaji Medical Centre, a clinic which is part of the UK P&I PEME programme, comments on the dangers of hepatitis B, the silent epidemic:

“Hepatitis B is easily preventable by vaccination and safe health practice, yet it still kills more people worldwide than HIV/AIDS. It is also the number one reason for crew failing their pre-employment medical examinations (PEME) and 9.6% of all unfit crew were found to have the disease.

“The disease is caused by a virus that infects the liver and is 50-100 times more infectious than HIV with 10-30 million individuals infected each year. The disease leads to life-long infection, cirrhosis, hepatato-cellular carcinoma and liver failure with a million people dying each year from hepatitis B and its complications with most people not having symptoms until it is too late. The main symptoms are fatigue, abdominal pain, and jaundice (yellow colouration of the skin).

“Circumstances that put individuals at risk of contracting the disease include unsterile medical equipment, handling clinical waste, intravenous drug abuse and sexual contact. In order to prevent crew from contracting the disease there are highly effective recombinant vaccines available. It is not a mandatory requirement to have received a vaccine to work onboard, although it is highly advisable. Additional preventative measures include the screening of blood donors and safe sex using barrier methods.

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For further details, please contact:

Gareth David / Carolyn Monchouguy / Ed Hooper / Helen Cotton
Four Broadgate
UKP&I@fourbroadgate.com
+44 20 3697 4200

Notes to editors:

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