Message of the Minister for Health on World Hepatitis Day, 28th July 2018

World Hepatitis Day is commemorated on July 28th each year to raise awareness on the global impact of this infection, which insidiously attacks the liver. This day is also commemorated to influence positive change in the response to the pandemic.

There are different types of viral Hepatitis. Viral hepatitis B and C are major health challenges, affecting 325 million people globally. Worldwide, 300 million people are living with viral hepatitis without knowing that they have the disease.

WHO will focus on the theme: "Test. Treat. Hepatitis" for World Hepatitis Day 2018 events. Without the health care providers knowing who the undiagnosed individuals are, and linking them to care, millions will continue to suffer, and lives will be lost. Viral hepatitis causes more than one million deaths per year worldwide. Chronic Hepatitis leads to two thirds of all liver cancers and causes enormous loss in productivity.

Since, 1995 Seychelles is providing vaccinations against Hepatitis B to all children. Health care workers as well as other emergency workers are also vaccinated.

The major Hepatitis challenge in Seychelles remains Hepatitis C and the majority of people diagnosed with hepatitis C in our country are young and are users of injectable drugs. Hepatitis C infection is linked to other infections such as HIV.

In Seychelles, as of June 2018, the total number of Hepatitis C cases is 1018. Since the beginning of the year till end of June 2018, 52 new cases of Hepatitis C have been reported. 36 of those persons diagnosed with Hepatitis C in 2018 are also co-infected with HIV.

This year, the World Hepatitis Alliance is calling on people from across the world to take action, raise awareness and join in the quest to find those “missing millions”.

Here too, we need to find our undiagnosed compatriots and, as much as possible, link them to the counselling, care, support and treatment that is appropriate for them.
The Ministry of Health is committed to adequately address the ongoing challenge of Hepatitis C and end it as a public health threat by 2030.

It is part of our efforts to achieve sustainable development goal 3, on health and wellbeing. The Ministry together with its partners are implementing a number of strategies to do so. Our significant research efforts are ensuring that information is available for focused action. Health service providers are designing and implementing targeted interventions for maximum impact. We are delivering services to cover the key populations who are in greater need of services, such as the intravenous drug users, sex workers and prison populations.

Government is ensuring that those interventions are adequately funded and financially sustainable.

For greater impact, our efforts must be better coordinated and must involve many more actors in society. Health professionals must continue to do their part in aiming to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat, emphasizing on prevention.

Society as a whole must eliminate stigma and discrimination against people who are hepatitis positive. We must relook at the weaknesses in some of prevention and care programmes and address them fully.

On this year’s Hepatitis Day, I urge all persons who think they could be at risk to come, be tested, and be counselled and if they meet the criteria for treatment, to be treated. Treatment modalities are improving all the time. But treatment and lifestyle-change go together. An early diagnosis, an early treatment and a timely lifestyle-change can make a huge difference in the life of an infected person.

Let us celebrate those who are helping themselves or helping others to come out from the grip of viral hepatitis.