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ATHLETES URGED TO THINK BEFORE THEY INK

Every four years many of the world's top athletes celebrate their participation in the Olympic Games by getting a tattoo, but Hepatitis Australia warns athletes to be careful they don't bring back more than medals from Beijing.

"It's only natural our athletes will want to remember their achievements by getting a tattoo of the iconic Olympic rings, but tattooing involves risks which many people don't realise." says Helen Tyrrell, Hepatitis Australia CEO.

Blood borne viruses such as hepatitis B and C can very easily be transmitted via inadequately sterilised needles which are used to inject the ink below the skin's surface or through unsafe practices such as dipping the tattoo needle into ink pots previously used on other customers.

"As one in 12 of the world's population has chronic hepatitis B or C and virtually one in 2 people under 30 have a tattoo, everyone would benefit from knowing more about the risks involved with tattooing."

"Chronic hepatitis B and C are serious diseases with often incapacitating symptoms and sometimes fatal outcomes. They kill 1.5 million people each year. Despite this, awareness of hepatitis B and C in Australia and worldwide is extremely low and young people in particular have been shown to be largely ignorant of infection risks."

While Australia's athletes have been offered vaccination against hepatitis B, there is no vaccine available to protect against hepatitis C.

"Getting a tattoo might hurt but doing your research first to protect yourself against hepatitis B or C certainly won't. Only use tattooists that follow correct infection control procedures, and if you're unsure; don't risk it."

For more information visit www.hepatitisaustralia.com or phone the national hepatitis infoline on 1300 437 222.

For further details please contact:

Helen Tyrrell
CEO, Hepatitis Australia
Phone: (02) 6232 4257
Email: Helen@hepatitisaustralia.com