

Find out about hemochromatosis

Bolton resident Josie St. Hilaire is the Ontario Regional Coordinator for the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society (CHS).

One in 300 Canadians are at risk of hemochromatosis, a genetic disorder which causes the body to absorb and retain too much iron. This causes an 'iron overload' to build up in parts of the body not designed to handle it, including organs like the heart, brain, liver and pancreas. It can be fatal.

St. Hilaire has organized a free information and awareness event this coming Wednesday (Sept. 30). It will be at North York Civic Centre (Committee Room 3) from 7 to 9 p.m. It will feature a talk by CHS' Executive Director Bob Rogers.

North York Civic Centre is at 5100 Yonge St., in Toronto.

Because hemochromatosis is not well known, even by many physicians, it often goes undiagnosed, according to CHS' President Ian Hilley. He added an estimated 80,000 Canadians do not know they have hemochromatosis, so they are at risk of developing seriously debilitating and even fatal diseases as a result.

Hemochromatosis can be easily diagnosed with a simple blood test, and once diagnosed, it generally can be easily managed through regular phlebotomies, or blood-letting.

He also said it is most common among people of Irish and Celtic descent and thus is often referred to as 'The Celtic Curse.'

The goal of CHS is to help raise awareness of hemochromatosis so that people with the symptoms can get tested, diagnosed and treated. But frankly it is a huge challenge to 'get the story out' about a disorder that is so little known and that is burdened with a strange, long name.

More details can be obtained from www.toomuchiron.ca and those interested are asked to register with St. Hilaire at jsthilaire@toomuchiron.ca