

Hepatitis C

What is Hepatitis C?

- “Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver.
- Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus.
- When someone is first infected with the Hepatitis C virus, they have what is an “acute infection.” Some people are able to clear the infection on their own. However, the majority of people go on to develop “chronic infection” This means the virus has stayed in your body for 6 months or longer.
- Over time, chronic infection with Hepatitis C can cause serious harm to liver. It can lead to other problems like cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver failure, and liver cancer.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C?

- Most people with Hepatitis C do not have symptoms. In fact, many people with Hepatitis C do not even know they have it.
- Those who do have symptoms may have fatigue (tiredness), nausea, itchy skin, poor appetite, and yellow skin and eyes.

How is Hepatitis C spread?

- The Hepatitis C virus spreads from person to person through contact with infected blood. This can happen if you:
 - Share drug needles with an infected person
 - Were born to a mother who has Hepatitis C
 - Are tattooed or pierced with unsterilized tools that were used on an infected person
 - Are accidentally stuck with a needle that was used on an infected person
 - Use an infected person’s razor or toothbrush
 - Have sex with someone who is infected
 - Got a blood transfusion in the United States before 1992

Fast facts

- Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver by the Hepatitis C virus.
- Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver disease and liver cancer in the United States.
- Hepatitis C can be cured by taking oral medications as directed.

Who should get tested for Hepatitis C?

- Talk to your doctor about getting tested for Hepatitis C if you:
 - Ever injected drugs, even if it was just one time or many years ago
 - Received donated blood or an organ transplant before 1992
 - Were born between 1945 and 1965
 - Have a sexual partner who has Hepatitis C
 - Were born to a mother who had Hepatitis C
 - Are on long-term hemodialysis

How is Hepatitis C treated?

- Hepatitis C is treated with oral medications. One or two medications may be used.
- Treatment is usually 8 to 12 weeks long.
- With the newest treatments, the chances of being cured are excellent. People who have not been treated before are cured over 90% of the time.
- The goal is to clear the Hepatitis C virus from your body.
- You are considered “cured” if the virus is no longer detected in your blood. This is determined by doing a blood test 3 months after your treatment is completed.

Can I get Hepatitis C again if I am cured?

- Yes. Clearing the Hepatitis C virus does not make you “immune.”
- It is possible to get the infection again.
- The best way to prevent reinfection is to avoid risky behaviors that can expose you to the virus.

How can Hepatitis C be prevented?

- There are no vaccines to prevent Hepatitis C.
- Avoid sharing or reusing needles and syringes.
- Do not use personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person’s blood.
- Do not get tattoos or body piercings from an unlicensed facility.
- Use condoms if you are sexually active with a new partner or with a partner who has injected drugs.

How can I protect my liver?

- Avoid drinking alcohol.
- Get vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B.
- Maintain a healthy weight through proper diet and exercise.
- Limit the use of acetaminophen to less than 2,000 milligrams a day.
- Ask your doctor before taking over-the-counter medications or herbal supplements.
- See your doctor for regular checkups.

Points to remember

- Many people do not know they have Hepatitis C until they already have liver damage, which can take years. Talk to your doctor about if you should get tested.
- Although Hepatitis C can be very serious, most people can lead full, active lives.
- If you have Hepatitis C infection, it can be cured.
- Successful treatment of Hepatitis C does not protect you from future infections. It is important to continue avoiding risky behaviors that can expose you again.

For additional information

- American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases –
<http://www.aasld.org/patients/> **[this hyperlink doesn't work]**
- American Liver Foundation – <http://hepc.liverfoundation.org/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention –
<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>