

Hepatitis C Fact Sheet

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver infection caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) that is spread primarily through contact with the blood of an infected person. Many persons who get hepatitis C will become chronically infected (long periods of time, sometimes years). More than half of those who are chronically infected will have liver damage and may eventually develop cirrhosis (scarring of the liver tissue) and/or liver cancer. Cirrhosis and liver cancer usually take many years to develop.

How is Hepatitis C Spread?

Hepatitis C is transmitted through the direct contact with blood or body fluids from an infected person.

Modes of Transmission:

- Sharing needles and syringes
- Tattooing, body piercing, and needle-stick injuries
- Babies born to mothers with Hepatitis C
- Sexual contact with infected person (less common)
- Razors and toothbrushes that has come in contact with another person's blood
- It is **NOT** spread through sharing food and drink, or through hugging, kissing, shaking hands, coughing, or sneezing. It is also not spread through food or water.

Who is at risk?

- If you have ever (even just once) injected illegal drugs
- Baby Boomers (born in 1946-1964)
- Have had a job that exposes you to human blood
- Were treated for clotting problems before 1987
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992
- Have multiple sex partners without using a condom
- Are a family member or housemate of an infected person
- Are infected with HIV
- Are on long-term hemodialysis

Symptoms of Acute (New) Hepatitis C

While most do not experience any symptoms for Hepatitis C, if symptoms do arise it occurs 4-12 weeks after exposure. It can still be passed to someone even if you are not showing symptoms. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Extreme fatigue (tiredness)
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored (gray) stools
- Abdominal (stomach) pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Joint pain
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice)

For chronic hepatitis C most people do not feel or look sick, but the liver is damaged. This can lead to serious liver disease, cancer, cirrhosis, or even liver failure, all which can be fatal. Hepatitis C is the lead cause for liver transplants in the United States.

Treating Hepatitis C

- There is **NO** vaccine for Hepatitis C
- **For Acute Hepatitis C:** Your specialist may recommend medication for acute hepatitis C infection. Healthcare providers also recommend rest, hydration and proper nutrition
- **For Chronic hepatitis C:** Treatment is available in the form of antiviral medications. Please consult your medical provider.
- **It is possible to be re-infected again after treatment**
- Undetectable means you cannot transfer the virus. So, if the virus is not detected in the blood when measured with a blood test three months after treatment has been completed, then you will not give the virus to anyone else.



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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Pregnancy and Hepatitis C

You should visit your doctor to be tested. If you are infected, after the baby is born the may have to take antiviral medication. The baby most also be tested. There is no known way to prevent the transmission of hepatitis C to the baby. Even though the hepatitis C virus has not been proven to be transmitted through breastfeeding, infected mothers should abstain from breastfeeding if their nipples are cracked or bleeding.

How is Hepatitis C Prevented?

- If you are a healthcare worker, follow routine barrier precautions: handle needles and other sharps safely
- Don't share needles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids
- If a surface is contaminated with blood or body fluids, wear latex gloves and clean with a disinfectant solution (one part household bleach to ten parts water)
- Don't use IV drugs. If you do, stop and get into a treatment program. If you cannot stop; NEVER reuse or share needles
- If you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing remember that you can get infected if the tools haven't been cleaned properly or if the artist doesn't wear clean gloves with each new customer
- Use a latex condom with water-based lubricant every time you have anal or vaginal sex.

In addition, if you have hepatitis C:

- Cover open sores or other breaks in your skin
- Don't share needles, toothbrushes, nail clippers, razors, washcloths or any other item that could be contaminated with blood
- Use a new condom with a water based lubricant every time you have anal or vaginal sex
- Throw away used personal items, such as tissues or menstrual pads and tampons in a bag that does not leak, so others will not be exposed to your blood
- Wash your hands well after touching your blood
- Don't donate blood, plasma, body parts or sperm
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B
- Do not use alcohol or other substances that can harm your liver
- See your healthcare provider regularly to monitor your liver. Discuss treatment options with your healthcare provider.

This FACT SHEET is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call the Lenawee County Health Department (517) 264-5238

More Information: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>



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