

YOUR Health

Los Angeles County Department of Health Services • Public Health

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What You Need to Know About Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is an inflammation of the liver caused by a virus. Nearly 4 million people are infected with Hepatitis C in the U.S. There is no vaccine to prevent the infection.

Most people don't know they have Hepatitis C and a positive diagnosis usually comes as a surprise. Of those exposed to the virus, approximately 80% will have a long-lasting illness that can cause inflammation and scarring of the liver.

Being diagnosed with a chronic illness can be very frightening. You may feel helpless and overwhelmed, especially if you are experiencing symptoms, but Hepatitis C is not necessarily fatal. With today's treatment options,

it is possible to live a normal life.

How Infection Occurs

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is primarily spread from person to person by direct contact with human blood. The most common modes of transmission include sharing IV needles and other drug paraphernalia (e.g. straws used for snorting cocaine), tattooing, body piercing, and sharing household items such as razors, toothbrushes, and nail clippers. Anybody who has engaged in any of these activities, even just once, should be tested for HCV.

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Lead in Mexican Candies



It is increasingly important for parents to be aware of the danger some imported candies pose. DHS' Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program warns consumers that high levels of lead have been found in candy made in Mexico by Dulmex.

Consumers should avoid purchasing and eating all Dulmex candies, especially coconut rolls, tamarind rolls, and tamarind lollipops. The rolls may be packaged under the names "Casa de Dulce," "Juanita's," "Payaso," or "Mojave." Lollipops are commonly packaged under the name "Bolirindo."

These candies, and especially their wrappers, contain dangerously high levels of lead. Children who eat foods with high lead levels can suffer serious health problems that can cause permanent brain damage.

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Your Pregnancy

Pregnancy can be a joyous time as a new life develops. At the same time, the expectant mother may feel confused, frightened, and uncertain as she notices the changes in her body as the baby grows. It is very important that you visit your healthcare provider regularly during your entire pregnancy, as soon as you know you're pregnant. Go to every appointment, especially during the first few months since they are crucial to ensure a healthy baby.

First Trimester

At your first prenatal visit, your physician will ask about your health history, your family history, and the history of the baby's father. You will be asked about any diseases you have been exposed to or had in the past, past operations, previous pregnancies and their outcomes. The physician will also perform a physical exam, laboratory tests, and a Pap test for cervical cancer. Let your physician know your worries at any of your visits, and ask about resources you can use to answer any other questions you may have. Your physician will also let you know the expected delivery date of your baby.

Second Trimester

In the second trimester, your physician will give you tests to make sure the baby is healthy. One of these tests, an ultrasound, is like an X-ray allowing the physician to see the baby and determine your baby's sex. Other tests your doctor might recommend are the triple screen test and the amniocentesis to determine if the baby has any birth defects. During this trimester, your physician will also be able to hear the baby's heartbeat and monitor the baby's physical development.

It is very important for you to recognize the signs of pre-term labor, even though the second trimester is far from the expected delivery date. Remember that a woman can enter into pre-term labor during this time, and emergency procedures will have to be used to stop the labor or save the baby. Please call your physician right away if you have the following symptoms: hard and painful contractions, menstrual-like cramping, sharp pains in your stomach, low pelvic pressure, low backache, increased discharge or blood from your vagina.

Third Trimester

During the last trimester of your pregnancy, you will discuss the type of delivery you plan to have with your

physician. You can have your baby naturally, through a vaginal birth without any drugs, or vaginally with medication support. Some women need to have a cesarean section (commonly known as a c-section), but this depends upon their physical condition.

If you are a first-time parent, consider attending classes on childbirth preparation, breastfeeding, and basic baby care during this last trimester to help you prepare. In addition, decide on a person who you would like to support you during labor and delivery. This person can be your spouse, mother, friend, midwife, etc.

Be prepared to go into labor. Know who to call and what to do. Have the phone numbers ready to call your doctor, the location of the hospital or birthing center that you will deliver at, and a loved one you may need to call. Consider going to the hospital and filling out the admission forms prior to delivery so you won't have to do it during labor. Be familiar with the hospital parking situation, the hospital's check-in procedures, and visiting rules.

You may feel anxious during this time because of the upcoming delivery. It is common to feel embarrassed if you mistakenly think you're in labor. This happens to many women! "Real" labor is usually characterized by:

- regular contractions that are spaced farther apart but become stronger in intensity;
- watery fluid leaking from your vagina;
- lower back pain that does not go away;
- and/or a bloody mucous discharge.

Many of these symptoms are due to your cervix (opening to the uterus) becoming dilated so that the baby's head can fit through and be delivered into this world!

Lead in Mexican Candies

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Background

Lead poisoning is one of the most common health problems affecting children in the U.S. It leads to elevated blood lead levels that are commonly due to exposure to lead-based paint or from lead-contaminated dust and soil. Other sources of lead exposure include folk remedies, Mexican terra cotta pottery, and seasonings imported from Mexico.

“Lucas Limon,” “Lucas Acidito,” “Super Lucas,” and “Super Jovy Chili Powder” are seasonings that are known to contain lead and distributed in small markets and at flea markets throughout California. The public is encouraged to report any sellers of the candy to the California State Food and Drug Branch by email: fdbinfo@dhs.ca.gov or through the automated 24-hour toll-free hotline: 1-800-495-3232. For more information on lead poisoning, visit the County’s Lead Poisoning Prevention Program website at <http://www.lapublichealth.org/lead/index.htm>, or call 1-800-LA-4-LEAD.

It is very important that you visit your healthcare provider regularly during your entire pregnancy, as soon as you know you’re pregnant.

Don’t be embarrassed to ask questions about your pregnancy! Your healthcare provider is happy to answer them. Being informed will help your pregnancy be a healthy one.

The Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program provides perinatal care for low-income pregnant mothers who are enrolled in Medi-Cal. CPSP teaches pregnant women the importance of nutrition, psychosocial well-being, perinatal education with basic obstetrical care. Call the county’s CPSP Program Office at (213) 639-6419 for more information.

The county’s Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health program offers many programs that focus on mothers, children, and adolescents.
[Http://lapublichealth.org/mch/index.htm](http://lapublichealth.org/mch/index.htm)



About Hepatitis C *continued from page 1*

Before 1992, HCV was transmitted by contaminated blood products via blood transfusion and clotting factors for hemophiliacs. Blood banks did not fully test the blood supply for HCV before that year.

Homelessness is a risk factor of HCV because of the environments and behaviors associated with homeless communities such as poor hygiene, poor nutrition, and high levels of intravenous drug use.

Although HCV is not easily spread through sexual intercourse, having multiple sexual partners does increase the risk.

Keep in mind that HCV is not transmitted by ordinary social contacts such as hugging, kissing, shaking hands, sharing food and drinks, using the same utensils and plates or using the same shower and toilet facilities.

Testing and Treatment

An HCV antibody test is a blood test used to screen for Hepatitis C. Treatment of HCV consists of weekly injections and medicine that need to be taken daily. It usually takes about 6-12 months for the treatment to be complete. The primary goal is to have undetectable virus in the blood during treatment and also six months after completion.

Most common side effects of therapy are flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, headache, muscle or joint aches, tiredness or fatigue. Mood change, depression, and weight loss can also occur. Effective monitoring is very important to spot potential problems. When side effects are managed effectively, the patient is more likely to complete therapy successfully.

In recent years, Hepatitis C management has become increasingly sophisticated and several alternative treatment options are currently being explored. The good news for patients is that some of the drugs look very promising.

To learn more about Hepatitis C and Hepatitis C community resources, visit the Hepatitis C Task Force for Los Angeles County at <http://www.hepctaskforcela.org>, or call 213-744-0724.

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