



Questions and Answers About HEPATITIS C



1. What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a serious liver disease caused by a virus (germ). The virus enters the blood stream, attacks the liver, causes illness and may even cause death. People can have acute (short-term) infection and be ill within the first 6 months of getting the virus. Most of the time, acute infection can lead to chronic (long-term) infection where the virus can stay in the body for a lifetime and can cause ongoing liver damage, including liver cancer.

2. How do you get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C can be spread by coming in to contact with an infected person's blood. For example:

- Being infected at birth (mother to baby)
- Having sex with an infected person
- Sharing toothbrushes and razors with an infected person
- Sharing needles for drug use, body piercing or tattooing
- Getting stuck with a needle that has infected blood on it (Hospital workers can get hepatitis C this way)

3. How do you know if you have hepatitis C?

Some infected people never feel sick. Other people won't feel sick for several months. Sometimes, infected people won't feel sick until 20 to 30 years later. People with hepatitis C can have some or all of the following symptoms:

- Stomach pain
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)
- Feeling like throwing up (vomiting)
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Yellowing of the skin
- Yellowing of the white part of the eyes (jaundice)
- Change in the color of urine or stool

A person with no symptoms can still give the illness to others. A blood test is taken to find out if you have hepatitis C.

4. How is hepatitis C treated?

Treatment depends on the type of hepatitis C. There is no medication available for acute (short-term) hepatitis C. During this time, it is important to eat healthy and drink plenty of fluids. If you have chronic (long-term) hepatitis C, it is very important to see your doctor often. Medications may be available. People with hepatitis C should avoid alcohol to prevent further liver damage. Depending on the type of hepatitis C an infected patient has, some are cured with treatment.

5. What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis C?

There are no shots (vaccines) to prevent hepatitis C but you can protect yourself:

- Use a condom or latex barrier when you have sex.
- Don't share personal items such as needles (syringes), razors, toothbrushes, earrings or any item that may have even small amounts of blood on it.
- Make sure body piercing or tattoo equipment is sterilized (germ-free).
- Wear gloves if you have to touch anyone's blood.
- Do not donate blood, organs or sperm if you ever tested positive for hepatitis C.

6. What other information do I need to know about hepatitis C?

Around 75 out of 100 people who get hepatitis C will develop chronic hepatitis C infection.

You can protect your liver from other damage by getting hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine. Adults should ask their health care provider about the vaccines. To find out where to get free shots, for adults and children, please call: **1-800-427-8700**.

Source(s):

1. *Hepatitis C*. L.A. Department of Public Health. www.lapublichealth.org/acd/Diseases/HepC.htm
2. *Hepatitis C*. CA Department of Public Health. ww2.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/HepatitisC.aspx
3. *Hepatitis C*. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HepatitisC.htm

For additional resources, please dial 2-1-1 or visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.