



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. A person can have an acute (short-term) infection and be ill within the first six months of getting the virus. Most of the time, acute infection leads to chronic (long-term) infection where the virus stays 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 in the following ways:

- 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?

People with hepatitis C can have some or all of the following symptoms:

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

Some infected people never feel sick, while others may not feel sick for several months. Sometimes, infected people won't feel sick until 20 to 30 years later.

A person with no symptoms can still give the illness to others.

4. How is hepatitis C treated?

Treatment depends on the type of hepatitis C a person has. There is no medication available for acute (short-term) hepatitis C. If you have chronic (long-term) hepatitis C, it is very important to see your doctor often because improved medications may be available. People with acute *or* chronic hepatitis C should avoid alcohol to prevent further liver damage. During the time you have hepatitis C, it is important to eat healthy and drink plenty of fluids.

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 by:

- Using a condom or latex barrier when you have sex.
- Not sharing personal items such as needles (syringes), razors, toothbrushes, earrings, or any item that may have even small amounts of blood on it.
- Making sure body piercing or tattoo equipment is sterilized (germ-free).
- Wearing gloves if you have to touch anyone else's blood.

Do not donate blood, organs or sperm if you've *ever* tested positive for hepatitis C.

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

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

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

Sources

1. *Hepatitis C*. L.A. County 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 visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.