

Questions and Answers about Hepatitis C

Q What is Hepatitis C?

A Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of a person who has the disease. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person.

Q How serious is Hepatitis C?

A Hepatitis C is serious for some people but not for others. Most people who test positive for Hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these people have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some people with liver damage due to Hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure, which may take many years to develop. Others have no long-term effects, and recover completely.

Q How is Hepatitis C spread?

A You could get Hepatitis C by:

- sharing drug needles.
- getting stuck with a needle that has infected blood on it. (Hospital workers can get Hepatitis C this way).
- being born to a mother with Hepatitis C.
- having sex with an infected person, especially if you or your partner has other sexually transmitted diseases.

You can't get Hepatitis C by:

- kissing, hugging and shaking hands with an infected person.
- sharing food, drink, or utensils with an infected person.
- casual contact or sitting next to an infected person.

Q What are the signs and symptoms?

A Most newly infected people (6-7 out of 10) have no symptoms and feel well. The few (2-3 out of 10) who do, have symptoms such as:

Yellow eyes or skin

Loss of appetite

Tiredness

Nausea

Abdominal pain

Vomiting

It is common for people who have been infected for a while (6 months or more) not to become ill from Hepatitis C again for 20-30 years.

Q What are the tests for Hepatitis C?

A

- To check for Hepatitis C, the doctor will test your blood.
- The tests show if you have been infected with Hepatitis C and how serious it is.
- The doctor may also do a liver biopsy. A biopsy (BYE-op-see) is a test in which a tiny piece of your liver is removed through a needle and checked for signs of liver damage.

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Q Is there treatment?

A Antiviral medicine is approved for the treatment of people with liver disease due to long term HCV infection. Treatment is effective in about 2-3 out of every 10 persons treated.

Q How can I protect myself from getting it?

- A**
- Don't shoot drugs.
 - If you can't stop, don't share drug needles with anyone.
 - Wear gloves if you have to touch anyone's blood.
 - Don't use another person's toothbrush, razor, or anything else that could have blood on it.
 - If you have a tattoo or body piercing, make sure it is done with sterilized tools.
 - If you have several sex partners, you should use a condom during sex.
 - If you have Hepatitis C, do not give blood or plasma. The person who receives it could become infected with the virus.

Q How can I protect myself if I already have it?

- A**
- See your doctor regularly.
 - Don't drink alcohol.
 - Don't start any new medicine without checking with your doctor.
 - A person who has Hepatitis C can still get other types of viral Hepatitis, such as Hepatitis A or B.
 - Get vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B if needed.

Q How can I prevent spreading Hepatitis C to others?

- A**
- Cover cuts or sores on the skin.
 - Don't donate blood, body organs, other tissue, or sperm.
 - Ask your doctor about having your sex partner tested.

Q What if I am pregnant?

- A**
- About 5 of every 100 infants born to HCV infected women become infected at the time of birth. There is no treatment that can prevent this from happening.
 - If you gave birth to any children since you became infected with HCV, ask your doctor about having them tested.

9/00

Your local Public Health Center is: