

# Hepatitis C

## Quick Facts



## What is Hepatitis C ?

Hepatitis C is an infectious liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C is spread through contact with blood from a person living with hepatitis C, and is the most common blood-borne pathogen in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than two million people in the United States (approximately 1% of the adult population) are living with hepatitis C.

For some people, hepatitis C is a short-term illness. For more than half of people who become infected with the hepatitis C virus, it becomes a long-term, chronic infection. Chronic hepatitis C can result in serious, life-threatening health problems like cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer. People with chronic hepatitis C often have no symptoms and don't feel sick. When symptoms do appear, they are often a sign of advanced liver disease. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. The best way to prevent hepatitis C is by avoiding behaviors that can spread the disease. Getting tested for hepatitis C is important because treatments can now cure most people living with hepatitis C in 8 to 12 weeks.

## Should I get tested?

The CDC recommends that everyone 18 years of age and older be tested for hepatitis C at least once in your lifetime. It is also recommended to get tested if you are pregnant during each pregnancy, and to get periodic testing if at risk of exposure.

## What are the Symptoms of Hepatitis C?

Eighty percent of people living with hepatitis C did not experience symptoms when infected. If symptoms occur, they typically begin 2 to 12 weeks after exposure. About 85% of people living with hepatitis C will become chronic carriers, and can infect others even if they do not experience symptoms.



ABDOMINAL PAIN



FEVER



DARK URINE



JOINT PAIN



DIARRHEA



FATIGUE  
(EXTREME TIREDNESS)



NAUSEA



VOMITING



JAUNDICE  
(YELLOWING OF  
THE EYES)



PALE STOOLS  
(POOP)



LOSS OF APPETITE

## How is Hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread mainly by direct contact with infected human blood through:

- Mother-to-child during delivery.
- Sexual contact with person with hepatitis C.
- Sharing contaminated equipment used to inject drugs (e.g. needles, syringes, drug preparation equipment).
- Exposure to needle sticks or sharp instruments through poor infection control practices in health care setting (e.g. dialysis units, diabetes clinics) or other settings (e.g. tattoo or piercing studio).
- Sharing contaminated items that can break the skin or mucous membranes (e.g. razors, toothbrushes, medical equipment).

## Who is at risk for Hepatitis C?

- People who were born to mothers living with hepatitis C.
- People who now or have ever injected drugs.
- People living with HIV.
- People who received blood, blood products, or solid organ transplants before 1992.
- Healthcare or public safety workers who may be exposed to the blood of someone living with hepatitis C.
- Household or sexual contacts of people with hepatitis C.
- People on dialysis.

## How can Hepatitis C be prevented?

- Avoid sharing needles, syringes, and other equipment used to inject drugs.
- Avoid sharing household items like toothbrushes or razors.
- Practice safe sex and use condoms.
- Use licensed tattoo and piercing studios.
- If living with hepatitis C, get treated to prevent transmission to others.

## How do I know if I have Hepatitis C?

Getting tested for hepatitis C can help a provider determine if you have a current infection, or have been infected with the virus in the past. There are multiple hepatitis C tests available. It is recommended that you follow up with your provider for interpretation of your results.

## How can Hepatitis C be treated?

Hepatitis C can be treated through a direct acting antiviral treatment. The treatment consists of taking one pill a day for 8 to 24 weeks, is well-tolerated, and is highly successful with 90% of people living with hepatitis C being cured at the end of their treatment.

**90%**  
of people living with hepatitis C  
can be cured in 8 to 24 weeks.

For additional information on hepatitis C visit:

[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm)

