

Hepatitis C Fact Sheet

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SOURCES:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- ❖ [Hepatitis C FAQs for the Public](#)
- ❖ [2010 STD Treatment Guidelines](#)

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

- ❖ [Hepatitis C Information](#)

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that affects the liver. Hepatitis C begins as an *acute* infection, a short-term illness that occurs within six months after someone is infected.

In most cases, hepatitis C remains in the body and becomes a long-term or *chronic* infection. This occurs in about 75%- 80% of those



What are the symptoms of acute hepatitis C?

About 75% of those with hepatitis C have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they can develop within a few weeks up to about six months (the average is six weeks) and might include:

- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Joint pain (arthritis)
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Fatigue (feeling tired all the time)



What are the symptoms of chronic hepatitis C?

Most people with chronic hepatitis C don't have symptoms. Even without symptoms, though, people with chronic hepatitis C are at risk for serious liver diseases such as cancer, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), or liver failure, all of which can be fatal (but may not show signs for years). Diseases caused by chronic hepatitis C are the leading cause of liver transplants in the U.S.



How common is hepatitis C?

An estimated 3.2 million people in the United States are living with chronic hepatitis C infection, and most don't feel ill or know they are infected, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

There are approximately 17,000 new hepatitis C cases each year in the U.S., many of which go unreported.



Testing/Diagnosis

There are several blood tests available for hepatitis C, and they can be done as a single test or as a combination of tests.



What is the treatment for acute hepatitis C?

Acute hepatitis C is typically an infection of short duration, and there is no specific medication to treat it. Healthcare providers often recommend getting rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating a healthy diet.



What is the treatment for chronic hepatitis B?

Anyone with chronic hepatitis C should be referred to a healthcare professional with experience in treating hepatitis and liver diseases. There are several medications available to treat chronic hepatitis C but not every case requires treatment. It's important that patients with chronic hepatitis C be evaluated often for liver diseases.

A person with hepatitis C should avoid alcohol and should check with his/her healthcare provider before taking any supplements or over-the-counter medications (as some of these products can damage the liver).



How do people get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C virus is transmitted through direct contact with blood from an infected person. The virus is most commonly transmitted through sharing of needles and syringes by injection drug users. Healthcare workers are at risk through needle sticks, as are babies born to mothers with hepatitis C.

Less commonly, hepatitis C is transmitted through sexual contact with an infected partner, or by sharing household objects such as razors and toothbrushes.

Hepatitis C is not spread through sharing cups and utensils, or through hugging, shaking hands, or breastfeeding.



Reduce your risk

There is no vaccine against hepatitis C, but there are ways to make infection with the virus much less likely:

- ❖ Avoid sharing objects that might contain blood, such as razors and toothbrushes.
- ❖ Injection drug users should never share syringes, needles, or other equipment.
- ❖ Don't donate blood or organs if you are infected with hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is not commonly spread through sexual contact. If your partner has the virus, though, using condoms or another latex barrier (like a dental dam) may offer some protection.

