

FACT SHEET

Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. For some, hepatitis C is a short-term illness, but for more than half of people, hepatitis C becomes a long-term chronic infection and can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis C is spread primarily by exposure to human blood or blood products. Hepatitis C is most commonly spread through sharing needles when using injectable drugs. It can also be spread by needle sticks or sharps exposure on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby through the birth process. Sexual transmission is possible but not common.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear between 2-12 weeks after exposure and can include:

- There may be no symptoms early on or symptoms may be mild (fatigue, nausea, headache and/or loss of appetite)
- More serious symptoms include fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, light colored stools, dark urine and occasionally yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice)
- Chronic hepatitis C may lower a person's energy level to the point where they have trouble with daily activities

How can it be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C.

- If you are infected with Hepatitis C, do not donate blood, body organs, other tissue, or sperm.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors or other personal articles that may have blood on them.
- Cover your cuts and open sores.
- To lower the risk of Hepatitis C transmission to your sex partner, use barrier methods (i.e., condoms) during sex.
- Stop drug use and get into a treatment program. If you cannot stop drug use, do not share needles, syringes, or other drug paraphernalia.
- Consider the risks involved with tattooing and body piercing. You can become infected if the tools are contaminated with blood and are not sanitized and disinfected properly.

How is it treated?

Getting tested for hepatitis C is important. The CDC recommends all U.S. adults get tested. Over 90% of people with chronic Hepatitis C can be cured with medication.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov