

HEPATITIS C FACT SHEET

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WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that causes liver inflammation, sometimes leading to serious liver damage.

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

Hepatitis C is transmitted primarily by exposure to blood infected with the Hepatitis C virus.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Hepatitis C is one of the viruses that usually does not show symptoms – even so, it can transition to what is known as a chronic Hepatitis C infection, and cause serious and long term effects without present symptoms. If symptoms occur, there is a chance that they may not appear until several years of significant damage to the liver. If symptoms appear early on after infection, referred to as the acute phase, they will appear 1-3 months after exposure, last 2 weeks to 3 months, and can present as:

- Fatigue;
- Jaundice;
- Nausea;
- Fever; and
- Muscle aches

Chronic Hepatitis C infection symptoms can look like:

- Bleeding or bruising easily;
- Jaundice;
- Drowsiness, confusion, and/or slurred speech;
- Darkly colored urine; and
- Itchy skin

COMPLICATIONS OF HEPATITIS C

Untreated Hepatitis C can cause significant health complications and specific to the liver:

- Scarring of the liver;
- Liver Cancer; and
- Liver failure

WHO'S AT RISK?

Albeit uncommon, you can contract Hepatitis C through unprotected sexual activity. Additional risk factors include individuals who(se):

- Are positive for HIV;
- Inject/inhale illicit drugs;
- Received a piercing or tattoo in an unsanitary environment;
- Birthing parent is/was positive for Hepatitis C at time your birth; and
- Are a health care worker who may have been exposed to infected blood

I'M PREGNANT - WHAT NOW?

If you are pregnant and positive for Hepatitis C, you can pass the infection to your child during pregnancy though unlikely. Please talk to your healthcare provider about examination, testing, and treatment. All pregnant individuals should receive testing at their first prenatal visit. The sooner you receive treatment, the less likely there will be health complications for your baby.

TEST OPTIONS

Testing for Hepatitis C will be conducted using a blood test.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Chronic HCV is often curable with oral medications taken every day for 2 –6 months. It is important to complete the treatment plan your health practitioner provides entirely i.e. do not share your medication or take only a portion of the medication provided. Medication will stop the infection, however, it may not undo any permanent damage caused by the disease.

WHEN TO HAVE SEX AGAIN?

While uncommon, it is possible to contract Hepatitis C through sexual activity. One does not need to halt sexual activity but status disclosure and condom use is highly recommended.