



Viral Hepatitis C

HS00-004D (3-08)

A 5-Minute Safety Training Aid

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes liver disease. The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is found in the blood and livers of people with hepatitis C infection. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person. Hepatitis C can be very serious. Individuals who are infected will carry the virus for the rest of their lives. These individuals may develop long-term liver damage, chronic liver disease, or cirrhosis. Some may feel very sick from the disease. Other infected individuals may feel healthy for many years after being diagnosed with hepatitis C. Cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and/or liver cancer can take a period of 20 to 30 years to develop. Less than 3% of infected persons may die from long term HCV. (Centers for Disease Control)

Hepatitis C Virus infection is the most common chronic bloodborne infection in the United States. Approximately 3.9 million people in the United States are infected with HCV. Chronic liver disease is the tenth leading cause of death among adults in the United States. (Centers for Disease Control)

Frequently Asked Questions About HCV:

How is HCV spread and who is at risk for HCV?

The virus is spread primarily through blood. People are at risk for developing hepatitis C infection if they:

- have used street drugs or shared needles, even just once.
- have received a blood transfusion, blood products, or an organ transplant before July 1992.
- have had sexual contact with infected persons, especially multiple partners and especially if they did not use condoms.
- are health care workers who may be exposed to blood or needles.
- are babies born to mothers who have hepatitis C.
- have been on kidney dialysis.

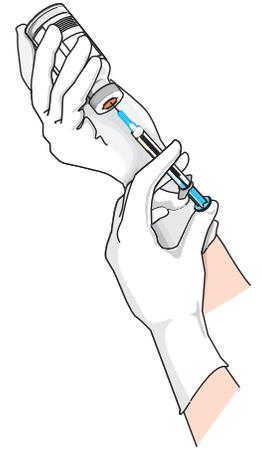
Hepatitis C virus is NOT spread by:

- sneezing;
- hugging;
- coughing;
- food or water;
- breast feeding;
- sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses;

- casual contact; or
- donating blood.

Can I be infected with hepatitis C during medical or dental procedures done in the United States?

Most medical and dental procedures currently performed in the United States do not pose a risk for the spread of HCV. Blood banks now screen donated blood for hepatitis C.



What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

- fatigue;
- abdominal pain;
- loss of appetite;
- nausea or vomiting; or
- jaundice (yellowish tint to the white part of the eye).

The most common symptoms of chronic hepatitis C are fatigue and jaundice. However, it may take 20 to 30 years after being infected for the chronic symptoms to appear. (Centers for Disease Control, Media Relations)

How do I know if I have HCV?

Ask your doctor for a blood test for hepatitis C if:

- you have ever injected street drugs, even if only experimentally.
- you were treated for clotting problems with a blood product made before 1987.
- you received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant (kidney, liver, etc) before July 1992.
- you were notified that you received blood that was contaminated with HCV.
- you were ever on long-term kidney dialysis.

Is there treatment for hepatitis C?

Interferon may sometimes be used to treat hepatitis C infection, usually in combination with other drugs, such as Ribavirin. Anyone with hepatitis C infection should not drink alcohol or take certain medicines that can cause liver damage. An infected person should also be vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B. (Massachusetts Department of Public Health, <http://www.mass.gov/hepc>.)

Why should I be tested for hepatitis C?

It is important to get early diagnosis so you can:

- be checked for liver disease;
- get treatment, if indicated;
- learn how to protect your liver from further harm; and
- learn how to prevent spreading HCV to others.

How can I protect myself from getting hepatitis C and other bloodborne diseases spread by contact with human blood?

- Don't ever shoot drugs.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles (they might have blood on them).
- Health care workers should always follow routine barrier precautions, safely handle needles and other sharps, and get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Consider the health risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing: You can get infected if the tools used have someone else's blood on them or the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices, such as washing hands and using disposable gloves.

Where can I get more information?

- Call your doctor, nurse, or health clinic
- Call your local board of health, listed under government
- Call - Hepatitis Foundation International (800) 891-0707
- Call - CDC, Hepatitis Branch (888) 443-7232
- Call - American Liver Foundation (800) 465-4837
- Call - National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (800) 891-5389
- Call – Texas Department of State Health Services, Infectious Disease Control Unit (512) 458-7455

Remember to practice safety. Don't learn it by accident.

Helpful web sites:

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>

<http://www.osha.gov>

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us>

<http://www.tdi.texas.gov>