

Hepatitis C

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. This virus is not spread by casual contact such as hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing, or sharing food or drink. Between 50 and 80% of people who are infected with hepatitis C will go on to carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Up to 25% of these carriers may develop cirrhosis or possibly liver cancer.

How Do You Get Hepatitis C?

- Exposure to blood and body fluids;
- Injection drug use. The virus can be spread by sharing or re-using needles;
- Receiving a transfusion or blood products. Blood products have been tested for hepatitis C since 1990. The risk of receiving hepatitis C from a transfusion is very low;
- An infected mother can pass the infection to her newborn child;
- Having sex with someone who has hepatitis C (rare).

What are the Symptoms?

Many people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Fever
- Vomiting
- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)

What is the Treatment?

Treatment is available for hepatitis C, but it is lengthy, has side effects and may not be suitable for all patients. People with hepatitis C need rest and a proper diet. Alcohol should be avoided. Talk to your doctor before taking any over the counter medication. Ask your doctor or Public Health Services about immunization against hepatitis A and B.

How Can You Prevent Hepatitis C?

- Do not share needles, razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, sexual toys, etc
- Clean up spills of blood of an infected person with a 1:10 solution of household bleach
- Use only professional tattoo artists and body piercing artists working in legitimate, reputable salons
- Practice safer sex

People with the hepatitis C virus should tell their doctors, dentists, dental hygienists and all of their sexual partners that they are infected. People with hepatitis C should not donate blood, organs or semen.