

- Don't donate blood, body organs, other tissue or semen.
- Don't share toothbrushes, dental appliances, razors or other personal articles that might have blood on them.
- Cover cuts and sores on the skin to keep from spreading infectious blood or secretions. Notify anyone exposed to your blood.

IF I TEST POSITIVE FOR HEPATITIS C, WHAT SHOULD I SAY TO MY LONG-TERM STEADY SEX PARTNER WHO DOES NOT HAVE HEPATITIS C?

You should discuss the risk of transmitting hepatitis C to your partner. The risk of transmitting hepatitis C through sex is low, but not absent. If you want to lower the limited chance of spreading HCV to your partner, you and your partner might decide to use condoms.

IF I HAVE HEPATITIS C, WHAT SHOULD I DO ABOUT GETTING PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding or just thinking about having children, here are some facts about hepatitis C, pregnancy and breastfeeding that may help:

- Approximately five out of every 100 infants born to women with hepatitis C become infected. (This occurs at the time of birth, and no treatment exists that can prevent this from happening.)
- Infants infected with hepatitis C at the time of birth usually do well in the first years of life. More studies are needed to determine how these infants do with time.
- No evidence exists that the method of delivery is related to transmission;

therefore, determining the need for cesarean section versus vaginal delivery should not be made just because the mother has hepatitis C.

- Limited information regarding breastfeeding indicates that hepatitis C probably isn't transmitted to the infant through breastfeeding, although HCV-infected mothers may consider avoiding breastfeeding, especially if their nipples are cracked or bleeding.
- If a woman who has hepatitis C has given birth to any children after she became infected, she should consider having the children tested for hepatitis C and, if positive, evaluated for liver disease.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER THINGS THAT I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HEPATITIS C?

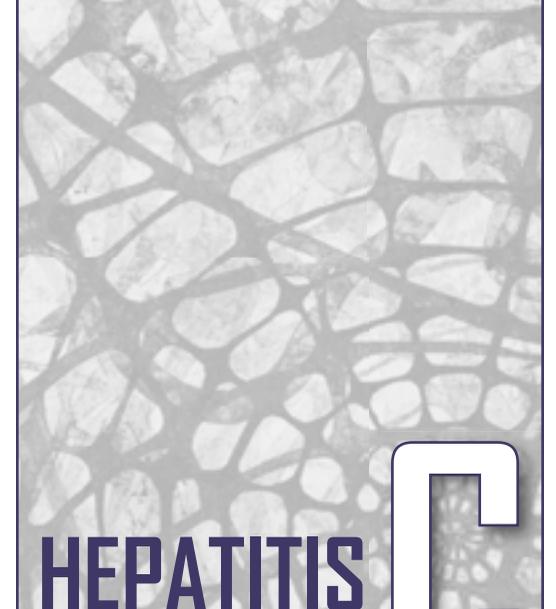
- Hepatitis C is not spread by sneezing, hugging, coughing, sharing food, water, eating utensils or drinking glasses, or by casual or household contact.
- People who have hepatitis C should not be excluded from work, school, play, child care or other settings.
- Let your doctor, dentist and nurse know that you have HCV.
- A support group might help those with hepatitis C cope with this infection.

WHAT IF I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS OR NEED MORE INFORMATION?

If you have more questions or if you would like more information about hepatitis C, please contact your local health department, your physician or any of the following organizations:

- **The SC Hepatitis C Coalition**
(803) 898-9562
www.schepatitisc.org
- **PegAssist** (Roche Pharmaceuticals)
1-877-734-2797 (toll free)
www.pegassist.com
- **Be In Charge** (Schering-Plough Pharmaceuticals)
1-888-437-2608 (toll free)
www.beincharge.com
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c
- **Medline Plus**
www.medlineplus.gov

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HEPATITIS



Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment.

WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a virus that infects the liver and may cause liver disease. Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is the most common chronic infection of the blood and is one of the major reasons for liver transplants in the United States. About 3-4 million Americans are infected with HCV. It is usually transmitted when blood or certain other body fluids from a person with hepatitis C enters the body of a person who is not infected. Hepatitis C is also spread through sharing needles or “works” when “shooting” drugs, through needlesticks on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth.

IS HEPATITIS C SERIOUS?

Most people who get hepatitis C carry the virus in their blood for the rest of their lives. Many people with HCV have no long-term effects. However, most people with HCV have some liver damage, although they may not feel sick. Some people will develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure over many years. Hepatitis C may increase the risk of liver cancer.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is spread by exposure to human blood and possibly genital fluids. People can get HCV if:

- They received blood-clotting factor before 1987.
- They were ever on long-term kidney dialysis.
- They received a blood transfusion, blood components or organ transplant (e.g., kidney, liver, heart, etc.) before 1992.
- They received blood from a donor who later tested HCV positive.

- They ever injected street drugs—even once—and even if it was a long time ago.
- Their mothers had hepatitis C at the time they gave birth to them.
- They ever had sex with a person infected with hepatitis C.
- They have had multiple sex partners—even if it was a long time ago.
- They have had multiple sexually transmitted diseases.
- They have or have had a sex partner with risk factors for HCV.
- They had accidental blood exposures, especially needlesticks.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS C?

If there are symptoms, they may include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, weight loss, mild fever and headaches. Hepatitis C will sometimes also cause yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine and light-colored bowel movements. However, most people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. They don't look or feel sick, but they can still infect other people and have liver damage.

IS THERE A VACCINE AGAINST HEPATITIS C?

Although there are vaccines to prevent other types of hepatitis, such as hepatitis A and hepatitis B, there is still no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

IS THERE A TREATMENT FOR HEPATITIS C?

Several antiviral drugs are being used to treat people with hepatitis C. These treatments can cure about 50 percent to 80 percent of persons with HCV. Not everyone with HCV can take or complete these treatments, which can cause many side effects.

HOW DO I FIND OUT IF I HAVE HEPATITIS C?

You can find out if you have hepatitis C by taking special blood tests.

WHY SHOULD I BE TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C?

If you have hepatitis C, it is important to find out early for these reasons:

1. You need to learn how to protect your liver from further damage.
2. You need to learn how to avoid giving this infection to others.
3. You need to see a doctor for evaluation and possible treatment.

HOW CAN I KEEP FROM GETTING HEPATITIS C IF MY TEST IS NEGATIVE?

If your test for hepatitis C is negative, here are some ways you can keep from getting hepatitis C:

- Don't share needles or use drugs; if you do, get help.
- Don't have sex or have sex only with one person who only has sex with you.
- If your sex partner has hepatitis C, use a barrier precaution such as a latex condom.
- Don't use razors, toothbrushes or other personal articles that belong to someone else.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY TEST FOR HEPATITIS C IS POSITIVE?

One of the first things you should do is to contact your doctor. Additional medical tests are needed to see if you are eligible for treatments. Other things that you will need to do are: (1) learn how to prevent

further harm to your liver, and (2) keep from transmitting HCV to other people.

WHAT IF MY TEST FOR HEPATITIS C IS POSITIVE BUT I DON'T FEEL SICK?

You should still see your doctor, even if you don't feel sick. Most people with long-term hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well, but even so, you should still see your doctor. For some people, the most common symptom is severe fatigue.

IF I TEST POSITIVE FOR HEPATITIS C, WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY LIVER FROM FURTHER HARM?

There are several things you can do to keep from causing further damage to your liver:

- Don't drink alcohol.
- Don't take high doses of Tylenol.
- Don't start any new medicines, including over-the-counter and herbal medicines, without checking with your doctor. If you are already taking any over-the-counter medicines or prescription medicine, talk with your doctor.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

IF I TEST POSITIVE FOR HEPATITIS C, WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TRANSMITTING IT TO OTHERS?

To reduce the risk of transmitting HCV to others:

- If you inject drugs and share needles, get treatment and quit sharing needles (or use bleach to disinfect the needles).
- If you are sexually active, consider abstaining from sex, or have sex with only one person and consider using condoms.