

The two pharmaceutical companies that currently have approved treatments for HCV, Roche and Schering-Plough, also have informative and helpful Web sites.

Roche's Web site is located at www.pegassist.com. "PegAssist" is the name of their support program for people undergoing treatment using their prescription combination drug therapy, Pegasys. If you cannot access the Web, they can also be contacted toll free at (877) 734-2797.

Schering-Plough's Web site is located at www.beincharge.com. "Be In Charge" is the name of their support program. It is similar to Roche's "PegAssist." They can be contacted by phone, also toll free, at (888) 437-2608.

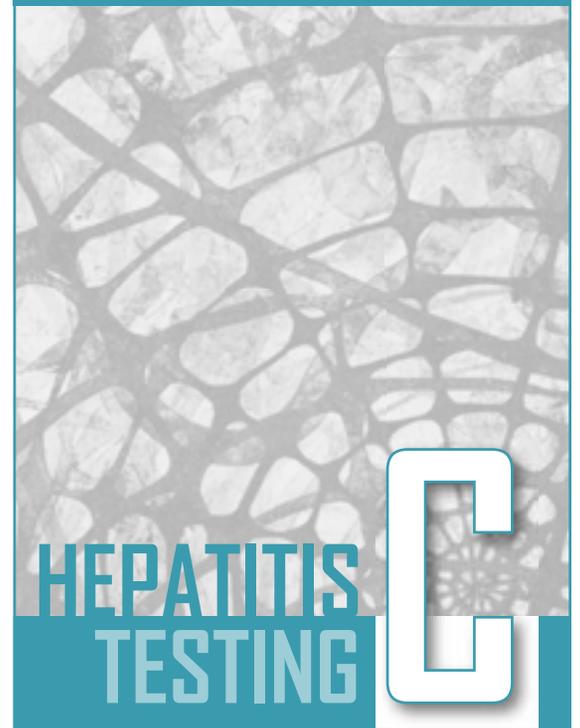
While both "PegAssist" and "Be In Charge" are targeted to the person undergoing treatment for HCV, they both offer help to those who have tested positive for the virus and are trying to make good decisions about medical care and treatment. In addition, both Web sites offer a great deal of information, frequently updated to reflect new discoveries, at no charge.

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 testing, 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

As a convenience, this brochure contains links to third-party Web sites. The linked sites are NOT under the control of DHEC, and DHEC is not responsible for the contents of any linked site or any link contained in a linked site. DHEC's inclusion of a linked site does NOT constitute an endorsement of the contents of the linked site.



WHAT DO THE HEPATITIS C TESTS MEAN?

First, the health department does a screening test for hepatitis C. This is an accurate method of screening out those people who do not have the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The hepatitis C screening test checks for the presence of the antibodies for hepatitis C. Antibodies are your body's reaction to infection with HCV. If these antibodies are not present, the person tested is not infected nor have they ever been infected in the past.

If the screening test is positive for the antibodies, the laboratory automatically does a second test to verify the presence of the antibodies. This is a confirmatory test, known as a RIBA test. The RIBA confirmatory test ensures that the positive screening test was accurate. If this second test comes back positive, we know that the person tested has been infected by the hepatitis C virus at some time in the past. However, this confirmatory test does not tell us when this exposure occurred, and it does not tell us if the person is still currently infected with active hepatitis C virus.

So, when the second test is positive, the laboratory automatically does a third test. This is a test to determine the presence of active hepatitis C virus. This test is commonly referred to as a "viral load" test, and it measures the amount of virus that is in the person's system at the time the test is done. If this test comes back positive, it is known that the person currently has active HCV in their system.

WHEN DO I NEED MORE TESTS? DO I NEED TREATMENT?

If the RIBA test or the viral load test for hepatitis C is positive, some additional tests

will help you and your doctor make a decision about whether you should have treatment. These tests are not available through the health department, so you will need to see a doctor about them.

The first is a liver function test. This is a blood test that will determine how well your liver is functioning because hepatitis C infection can damage the liver.

Another test that you will need is a test known as "genotyping." This is also a blood test that tells you and your doctor which genetic type of HCV is in your system. This is important in deciding whether or not to treat the hepatitis C infection, as one genotype of HCV is more resistant to treatment than others. That is, the chance of the treatment being a success is lower if you have a certain genotype.

Another important test that can help you and your doctor make a decision about how to proceed is a liver biopsy. This is a minor surgical procedure that will tell you and your doctor the current condition of your liver tissue. A liver biopsy may not be necessary for everyone infected with hepatitis C.

The decision to have treatment for hepatitis C is complex. Your doctor will discuss the results of the tests with you and what is known about the best time and the best way to treat hepatitis C.

WHAT CAN I DO?

If nothing else, once you know that you are infected with HCV, you should stop using any alcohol. Drinking alcohol is very hard on a person's liver, especially if they are infected with HCV. Alcohol will only increase any

damage to your liver. So, if you have hepatitis C, you should not drink. In addition, general health issues should be considered. Drink plenty of water, get moderate exercise, and eat healthy foods - do all the things we have been told that we should do to take care of our bodies. In truth, virtually everything a person ingests has some impact on the liver, so it is also a good idea to consult with a health care professional before taking any medications. This includes both over-the-counter medicines as well as prescription medicines.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HEPATITIS C?

If you have been diagnosed with hepatitis C and would like to talk with someone about your condition, your test results, treatment or any other aspect of this disease, the South Carolina Hepatitis C Coalition can be a good starting point. The phone number for the coalition is (803) 898-9562. Basic information about the coalition is also available on the Web at www.schepatitisc.org.

The Internet provides a number of Web sites that have helpful information on hepatitis C, but just because information is available on the Internet does not mean it is accurate. Some sites that have useful and accurate information include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Be In Charge and PegAssist.

The CDC Web site is located at www.cdc.gov. The full address for the section on viral hepatitis C is www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c. This site offers a wealth of information and stays up-to-date on new developments.