

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by infection with the hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease.

Why should you be tested for hepatitis C?

If you test positive for hepatitis C, it is very likely that you have chronic (long-term) liver disease. You will need to see a doctor to:

- determine if you have liver disease and how severe it is.
- determine if you should be treated for your liver disease.
- learn how you can protect your liver from further harm.
- learn how you can prevent spreading HCV to others.

To get tested, follow the advice of your doctor or the notification letter. Do not donate blood to get tested.

What if you don't feel sick?

Many persons who have hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well. For some persons, the most common symptom is extreme tiredness. The only way to tell if you have been infected with HCV is to have a blood test. About 4 million Americans are infected with HCV and most don't know it. Whether you feel sick or not, you should have a blood test for hepatitis C.

How serious is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these persons have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some persons with liver damage due to hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure, which may take many years to develop. Others have no long term effects.

If you have hepatitis C you should protect your liver by:

- seeing your doctor regularly.
- not drinking alcohol.
- not starting any new medicines, including over-the-counter and herbal medicines, without checking with your doctor.
- getting vaccinated against hepatitis A if you have liver damage.

Is there a treatment for hepatitis C?

Antiviral medicines are approved for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C. Treatment is effective in about 2-3 out of every 10 persons treated. You should check with your doctor to see if treatment would help you.

There is no vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C

Who else is at risk of getting hepatitis C?

Others at risk of getting hepatitis C are persons who ever injected street drugs, healthcare workers exposed to blood in the workplace, and babies born to infected mothers. HCV also can be spread by sex, but this does not occur very often.

If you have hepatitis C you can prevent spreading HCV to others by:

- not donating blood, body organs, other tissue, or sperm.
- not sharing toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles that might have blood on them.
- covering cuts or sores on the skin.

Persons should not be excluded from work, school, play, child-care, or other settings on the basis of their HCV infection status.

If you have hepatitis C: You do not need to change your sexual practices if you have one steady partner.

- If you have one steady sex partner, there is a very low chance of giving hepatitis C to that partner through sexual activity.
- If you want to lower the small chance of spreading HCV to your partner, you may decide to use latex condoms.
- Ask your doctor about having your sex partner tested.

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You do not need to avoid pregnancy or breast feeding.

- About five out of every 100 infants born to HCV infected women become infected. This occurs at the time of birth, and there is no treatment that can prevent this from happening.
- Most infants infected with HCV at the time of birth seem to do very well in the first few years of life.
- More studies are needed to find out if these infants will have problems from the infection as they grow older.
- If you gave birth to any children since you became infected with HCV, ask your doctor about having them tested.

HCV is NOT spread by:

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

If you use or inject street drugs:

- Stop and get into a drug treatment program.
- If you cannot stop, do not reuse or share syringes, water, or drug works.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis B and hepatitis A.

If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner:

- You and your partners can get diseases spread by having sex, such as AIDS, hepatitis B, chlamydia, or gonorrhea.
- Use latex condoms correctly and every time.
- The surest way to prevent the spread of any disease by sex is not to have sex at all.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis B.

For information on viral hepatitis:

access our website at
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/>
or call the Hepatitis Hotline at
1-888-4HEPCDC, 1-888-443-7232

or write

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Hepatitis Branch, Mailstop G37
Atlanta, GA 30333

or

Contact your state or local health department

GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C

You should be tested if you were notified that you received blood that possibly contained hepatitis C virus (HCV) or if you received blood before July 1992

Why did you receive blood that may have contained HCV?

You may have received this blood before tests to identify blood donors with hepatitis C were available or when they were less precise than they are now. The discovery of HCV was reported in 1989. The first blood test for HCV became available in May 1990, which identified most, but not all, donors infected with HCV. Improved blood tests were put into use in July 1992. If you received blood after this date, you also may be notified because some donors who tested negative for HCV with these improved tests were in a very early stage of infection that the test could not detect.

