

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by a virus.

What are the symptoms?

- There may be no symptoms of acute hepatitis C or
- Symptoms may include tiredness, nausea, headache and loss of appetite;
- More serious symptoms include fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, light colored stools, dark colored urine and occasionally yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice).

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

On average, symptoms occur 6-7 weeks after exposure but this can range from two weeks to six months.

How is hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread when blood from a person infected with hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. Injection drug users, people who received blood transfusions prior to 1992 or people receiving hemodialysis are at increased risk. Health care workers with frequent exposure to blood are also at risk. Mothers can pass it to infants at birth. Less commonly, a person can get hepatitis C through sexual contact and sharing personal care items such as razors and toothbrushes.

Is there a test for hepatitis C?

Yes, there is an antibody test for hepatitis C. However, this test only tells you if you have been infected. If the antibody test is positive, a second blood test can be done to determine whether the virus is still present.

How long is a person contagious?

A person may be contagious one week or more before the onset of the first symptoms. Up to 85% of all cases may be infected longer than six months and become chronic carriers. This chronic infection may be lifelong. A person infected with hepatitis C may also be able to give the disease to others for the rest of their lives.

Can hepatitis C be treated?

There is no medication available to treat acute hepatitis C. There are experimental treatments that may be effective in some cases of chronic hepatitis C. Talk to your doctor about treatment of hepatitis C infection.

Can hepatitis C be prevented?

Ways to protect yourself are:

1. Avoid drug use with used needles and straws;
2. Use only your own personal grooming items such as razors and toothbrushes;
3. Have only one sex partner;
4. Use condoms during sex;
5. Avoid tattooing and body piercing.

Are there complications of hepatitis C?

Chronic hepatitis C may lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

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Are You At Risk For Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. Signs of the disease may show up quickly or may take several years to develop.

Take this quick test to see if you are at risk:

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| 1. Have you ever injected illegal drugs (shared needles), even once many years ago? | YES | NO |
| 2. Have you ever gotten a non professional tattoo? | YES | NO |
| 3. Have you ever snorted cocaine (shared straws)? | YES | NO |
| 4. Have you had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992? | YES | NO |
| 5. Have you received clotting factor before 1987? | YES | NO |
| 6. Have you ever had long-term hemodialysis? | YES | NO |
| 7. Have you had persistent elevated liver enzyme (ALT) tests? | YES | NO |
| 8. Have you tested positive for HIV? | YES | NO |
| 9. Are you a health care or public safety worker who has received an accidental needle stick or been exposed to blood? | YES | NO |
| 10. Did your mother have hepatitis C when you were born? | YES | NO |

If you answered YES to any of these questions you may be at risk for hepatitis C. Ask your doctor about being tested.

For more information on Hepatitis C, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health.

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