

Hepatitis C



Frequently Asked Questions

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis (hep-AH-ty-tis) C is a liver disease caused by infection with hepatitis C virus. A simple blood test can tell whether people were exposed to the hepatitis C virus. An estimated 160,000 people in New Jersey have hepatitis C.

Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

Those at greatest risk of getting infected with the hepatitis C virus are:

- People who share needles or syringes with others to inject drugs (or did so in the past)
- People who have had multiple sex partners and didn't use condoms
- People who have been on kidney dialysis
- People who received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
- Health, dental and emergency care personnel who have contact with blood

How do people get hepatitis C?

The hepatitis C virus is spread by contact with an infected person's blood. Hepatitis C can be spread through sexual contact, although this is rare. A pregnant woman can pass the virus to her unborn child. Hepatitis C is not spread by hugging or shaking hands with an infected person, sitting near people infected with the virus or other casual contact, breathing the same air or from food or water.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

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

- Tiredness
- Nausea
- Fever
- Diarrhea
- Lack of appetite
- Yellowish skin or eyes

How is hepatitis C diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects hepatitis C, samples of the patient's blood will be examined.

Can people with hepatitis C pass the illness to others?

Infected people are capable of spreading hepatitis C to others as long as the hepatitis C virus is circulating in his/her blood.

How can I protect myself from hepatitis C?

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but you can take steps to protect yourself.

- Avoid direct contact with blood.
- Never share drug injection equipment.
- Use condoms when having sex.
- Get tattoos or body piercings from people who use sterile inks and tools.
- Do not use personal care items, such as razors, toothbrushes, or anything that could have blood on it.
- Wear gloves when touching another person's blood.

Is there treatment for hepatitis C?

A drug called interferon is used to treat hepatitis C. It is usually used with other medications. Your health care provider can tell you more about treatment options.

If the liver is severely damaged, a liver transplant may be recommended, but there is often a long waiting list for transplants. People with hepatitis C should not drink alcohol (or should cut back how much they drink), not eat raw seafood and should consider being vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

Will hepatitis C go away without treatment?

Hepatitis C is a very serious disease for some people but not for others. It is not possible to know which people will develop serious problems. Most people who have hepatitis C will carry the virus in their blood for the rest of their lives.

Should an infected people be excluded from work or school?

People infected with hepatitis C should not be excluded from work or school. Infected people should be counseled, however, regarding the precautions they should take to reduce the chance of exposing others to their blood or body fluids.

Where can I get more information?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health and Senior Services <http://www.nj.gov/health>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c/>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional.
Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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