

HEPATITIS C

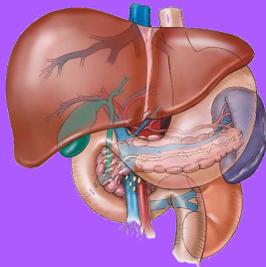
What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a contagious liver disease that ranges in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness that attacks the liver. It results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is spread primarily through contact with the blood of an infected person. Hepatitis C can be either “acute” or “chronic.” Chronic Hepatitis C can lead to liver cancer, liver failure or cirrhosis.

Symptoms of Hepatitis C

Approximately 70%–80% of people with acute Hepatitis C do not have any symptoms. Some people, however, can have mild to severe symptoms soon after being infected, including

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellow color in the skin or eyes)



If symptoms occur, the average time is 6–7 weeks after exposure. However, many people infected with the Hepatitis C virus do not develop symptoms.

How do People get Hepatitis C?

In general, you get Hepatitis C by coming in contact with blood contaminated with the virus. Most people with Hepatitis C became infected through blood transfusions received before 1992, the year improved blood-screening tests became available.

You can also get the virus by injecting drugs with contaminated needles and, less commonly, from contaminated needles used in tattooing and body piercing. A small number of babies born to mothers with Hepatitis C acquire the infection during childbirth.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Hepatitis C

A blood test can determine whether you have the Hepatitis C virus.

There is no medication available to treat acute Hepatitis C infection. Doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids.

People with chronic Hepatitis C should be monitored regularly for signs of liver disease and evaluated for treatment. There are some medicines used for treatment of Hepatitis C, however, not every person with chronic Hepatitis C needs or will benefit from treatment. In addition, the drugs may cause serious side effects in some patients.

How Can I Help Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis C?

Because no effective vaccine for Hepatitis C exists, the only way to protect yourself is to avoid becoming infected. That means taking the following precautions:

- Avoid illegal drug use
- Avoid body piercing and tattooing,
- Avoid risky sexual behavior.

For more information, contact a Public Health Nurse at City-county Health Department at 454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org or cdc.gov