



# HCSP FACT SHEET

HCV ADVOCATE

• HCV TRANSMISSION AND PREVENTION •

## Are You at Risk for Hepatitis C?

—Alan Franciscus, Editor-in-Chief

### Forward

This fact sheet is designed to help you understand the risk factors for acquiring hepatitis C (HCV). If you find out you are infected with hepatitis C there are many positive steps you can take to treat it. The new drugs to treat hepatitis C have few side effects, are taken for a short period of time and can now cure more than 90% of people who are treated.

### Direct blood-to-blood contact

Hepatitis C is spread by direct blood to blood contact. Anything that places another person's blood in direct contact with your blood, or vice versa should be handled with care. Being careful and using common sense in any situation where blood is present (yours or someone else's) will help protect you from hepatitis C as well as other blood-borne diseases.

### Baby Boomers

The majority of people with HCV (75%) in the United States were born 1945 through 1965 and most are unaware of their infection. For this reason the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) have recommended a one-time test for everyone in the United States born 1945 through 1965. This test is expected to identify approximately 800,000 cases of chronic hepatitis C. If born in this period – get tested.

### Sharing drug using equipment

Sharing equipment for injection and non-injection drugs such as needles, cottons, cookers, ties, straws, pipes and even water are some of the easiest

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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ways to get hepatitis C. Even the smallest amounts of blood that you may not be able to see can transmit the virus. Making sure your equipment stays personal and isn't shared with anyone will help you stay healthy. If you have ever injected street drugs or shared a needle with another person — even just once — you should be tested for hepatitis C.

**Blood transfusions & medical procedures before 1992**

Before 1992, many people contracted hepatitis C through blood, blood product transfusions, and/or solid organ transplantation. If you had a medical procedure where blood or blood products were used you could have been at risk. Now the blood supply is considered safe. Now transfusion-associated cases occur less than one per 2 million blood transfusions. The risk of getting hepatitis C from a medical procedure is rare, but safety procedures have to be followed carefully.

**Medical and dental procedures performed in some foreign countries**

Immigrants from foreign countries are at risk for hepatitis C if the country that they immigrated from does not follow standard safety precautions to prevent transmission of hepatitis C in any situation where blood is involved. Talk to your medical provider if you believe you are at risk.

**Blood clotting factors before 1987**

People who received blood clotting factors before 1987 should be tested for hepatitis C.

**Hemodialysis**

People who receive hemodialysis (treatment when the kidneys fail) should be tested on a regular basis for hepatitis C.

**Children born to hepatitis C positive women**

The likelihood of transmitting hepatitis C from a hepatitis C positive mother to her child is very low. Current studies have found that about 6% of babies born to HCV positive mothers get hepatitis C. If your mother is HCV positive you should be tested.

**Sexual transmission**

Sexual transmission of hepatitis C is uncommon. People who are in a stable long term monogamous relationship are at a low risk of getting hepatitis C from their sexual partner. However, in some so-called high risk groups, including people who have unprotected sex with multiple partners or have sex with someone with a sexually transmitted disease, the risk of getting hepatitis C is higher. If you are worried about sexual transmission and would like to get tested, talk with your medical provider.

**Occupational exposure**

Health-care workers who come in contact with blood are at risk for getting hepatitis C and should be tested. However, the general rate of transmission is very low with about a 2% prevalence of hepatitis C in the healthcare industry. The most common cases of transmission occur in needle-sticks with hollow-bore needles. If you were exposed to any hepatitis C infected blood you should be tested.

**Getting tattoos and piercings**

If you ever received a tattoo or piercing in an unsafe setting you should be tested for hepatitis C. Most commercial tattoo parlors follow standard safety precautions to make sure that only new needles and a separate ink pot is used for each consumer. In other settings, such as in a prison or on the street, the chance of getting hepatitis C is higher.

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**Acupuncture**

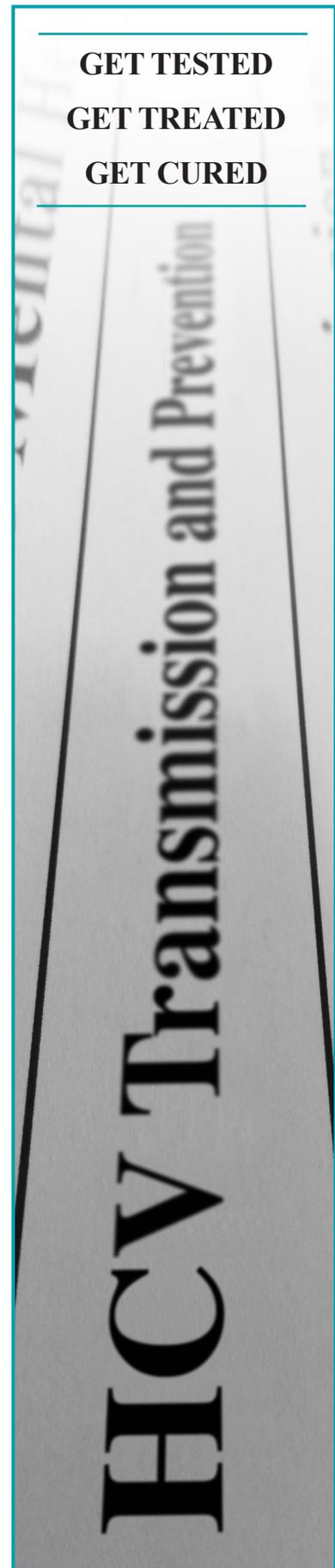
If you get acupuncture, the same safety precautions apply. Only new acupuncture needles should be used for each client, and your acupuncture provider should take safety precautions against spreading hepatitis C.

**Sharing personal items**

The transmission of hepatitis C from personal hygiene items is uncommon. But there is a potential to get hepatitis C from sharing toothbrushes, razors, clippers, and nail files. If you come in contact with a hepatitis C infected personal hygiene item get tested to be safe.

**HIV Positive**

It is recommended that people who are infected with HIV should be tested for hepatitis C because of similar risk factors. In addition there have been outbreaks of acute hepatitis C among HIV-positive men who have sex with men. Many providers now recommend that HIV positive men who have sex with men who engage in high risk sexual practices should be tested for hepatitis C on an annual basis.



**Related publications:**

- **HCV Transmission and Prevention Overview**  
[www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/Transm\\_preven.pdf](http://www.hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/Transm_preven.pdf)
- **Frequently Asked Questions about Sexual Transmission**  
[http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/sexFAQ.pdf](http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/sexFAQ.pdf)
- **How Long Does HCV Live on Surfaces and in Syringes?**  
[http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/How\\_long.pdf](http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/How_long.pdf)

**For more information**

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