

frequently asked About Hepatitis C



General Information

Q What is hepatitis C ?

answer

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is the most common blood-borne infection in the United States. The hepatitis C virus infects liver cells, causing inflammation that results in damage of liver tissue. Hepatitis C accounts for the majority of what was referred to in the past as non-A, non-B hepatitis. Hepatitis C causes up to about 19,000 deaths per year due to severe liver disease and cancer.

Q How is hepatitis C spread ?

answer

Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C infection. The hepatitis C virus is spread most commonly in blood and less commonly via sexual intercourse. The risk factors for infection are:

- Injection drug use (even once)
- Long-term hemodialysis
- Had an unsafe (non-sterile) tattoo or piercing—prison or street
- Unprotected sex with multiple partners or a history of STDs
- Occupational exposure to blood or needles

- Receipt of blood transfusion or organ transplant prior to 1992
- Being born to an HCV infected mother (low risk)
- Received clotting factor before 1987

Q What are the effects of hepatitis C ?

answer

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hepatitis C will become a chronic infection in approximately 75-85% of those infected with the virus. In general, the disease seems to slowly progress over 10 to 40 years. Many people who are chronically infected do not even know they carry the virus until complications arise. Conditions such as cirrhosis (severe extensive scarring) and fibrosis (light to severe scarring) are not uncommon among people with HCV infection. These conditions make it difficult for the liver to function properly. In addition, like the hepatitis B virus, HCV infection is associated with an increased chance of developing hepatocellular carcinoma, a type of liver cancer.



**HEPATITIS C
SUPPORT PROJECT**

frequently asked About Hepatitis C

Q How will I know if I have hepatitis C ?

answer

Individuals infected with hepatitis C are often unaware of their illness because **most people do not have specific symptoms**. However, symptoms may include:

- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay colored stools (bowel movements)
- Jaundice
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Nausea

An antibody test for hepatitis C is available to determine if you have ever been infected with the hepatitis C virus. About 15-25% percent of those infected will resolve (get over) the infection on their own without treatment, but most will become chronically infected. Additional tests, such as a HCV RNA or viral load tests are necessary to determine if you are currently infected with the hepatitis C virus. Other tests to check liver functions and genotyping are used to help in the diagnosis and treatment process.

Q Is there a treatment for hepatitis C ?

answer

Yes. Treatments are available that may help the body suppress the replication of the virus and, in some cases, the virus can become undetectable in the blood (called a “viral cure”). Up to 90 – 100% of people who take the current medications can be cured. Talk to your medical provider to find out more about current HCV medications and whether treatment is right for you. Even if you don’t choose to go on therapy, there are still many things you can do to help ensure that your liver remains healthy. Reducing or eliminating your alcohol consumption, limiting use of over-the-counter pain relievers as directed by your physician, eating a well-balanced diet, getting plenty of rest, and exercising regularly can all help keep you and your liver healthy.

• Hep C FAQ sheet •

A publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

Executive Director
Editor-in-Chief, HCSP Publications
Alan Franciscus

Author
Alan Franciscus

Design
Leslie Hoex

Production
C.D. Mazoff, PhD

Contact information:
Hepatitis C Support Project
PO BOX 15144
Sacramento, CA 95813
alanfranciscus@hcvadvocate.org

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.

This information is provided by the Hepatitis C Support Project, a nonprofit organization for HCV education, support and advocacy.

Reprint permission is granted and encouraged with credit to the Hepatitis C Support Project.

©July 2015 Hepatitis C Support Project