

frequently asked About Hepatitis C



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 great majority of what was referred to in the past as non-A, non-B hepatitis. Hepatitis C causes approximately 8,000 to 10,000 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*
- *Tattooing or body piercing (unsterilized equipment or while incarcerated)*
- *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)*

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 55-85% 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 (scarring) and fibrosis 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.



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 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

• Hep C FAQ sheet •

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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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An antibody test for hepatitis C is available to determine if you have ever been infected with the hepatitis C virus. About 15-45% percent of those infected will resolve (get over) the infection on their own without treatment, but most will become chronically infected. Additional tests are necessary to determine if you are currently infected with the hepatitis C virus. Others tests to check liver functions and genotyping are used to help in the diagnosis and treatment process.

 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. Treatment is not necessary or even appropriate for everyone, so you must talk with your doctor about your options. 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.

Information and translation services provided by the Minnesota Department of Health.

For more information visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us

