

frequently asked About Hepatitis C



Sexual Transmission of HCV

Q What are the chances of getting or even spreading hepatitis C (HCV) through Sex?

answer

The answer to that question is very complicated. There is a lot of confusion as to how hepatitis C is transmitted sexually. First of all, it can be transmitted sexually but the information we have now tells us that it doesn't happen very often, especially in long-term monogamous straight relationships, where, if anything, it is considered uncommon. The important thing to remember is that hepatitis C is spread by direct blood-to-blood contact.

Q What does that mean?

answer

It means that in order to transmit or become infected with hepatitis C, HCV-infected blood must get into someone's blood directly from another person's blood that is infected with hepatitis C. The most common ways you can get hepatitis C are from sharing needles and the stuff you use to inject drugs (needles, cookers, cotton, ties, water, etc.). The other common ways you can get hepatitis C are from a blood product and/or a blood transfusion you received before 1992. People who undergo hemodialysis treatments (blood filtering) are also at risk. Less common ways that HCV is transmitted are from an HCV positive mother who can pass it on to her baby, but this doesn't happen very often. The ways that hepatitis C can be transmitted that don't happen very often include sexual transmission, tattoos, piercings, straws to snort drugs and sharing hygiene items such as toothbrushes and razor blades.

Q Since hepatitis C can be transmitted through sex what is the general advice?

answer

Again it is complicated but the general information about sexual transmission is broken down by type of sexual activity, how long you have been with a certain sexual partner and whether people have sexually transmitted diseases. For straight people who are in a stable long-term monogamous relationship the chances of giving or getting hepatitis C are very low.

Q How do you define "straight people in a long-term monogamous relationship"?

answer

The information that we have on heterosexual long-term monogamous partners is that it is uncommon to pass it sexually. That is usually defined as a straight person in a relationship for 5-10 (or more) years and who doesn't have sex with anyone else outside of the relationship. In this group the chances are very low – in fact the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) does not recommend that these people change their current sexual practices.



**HEPATITIS C
SUPPORT PROJECT**

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Q Does this mean that it can still be passed in this group of people?

answer

Yes, there is still the chance of passing it on to your sexual partner. Both people in the relationship need to discuss the risk and (even though low) there is a slight possibility that someone could give or get hepatitis C even in this group.

Q What about a person who is not in a stable monogamous straight relationship?

answer

That's where it gets a little more complicated. We believe that people who have a lot of sexual partners, have a sexually transmitted disease such as herpes, HIV or hepatitis B or any sex that involves blood, are at a higher risk for transmitting

or getting hepatitis C through sex. The chances for having blood exposure through anal sex, rough sex, and dry sex are also higher. Sex toys that are shared between partners could also have blood on them. In these cases it is always best to practice safer sex (barriers such as rubbers, etc.) to prevent giving or getting hepatitis C and other diseases.

Q What about sex when a woman is having her menstrual period?

answer

That's an important point to bring up. Since there is blood present it is recommended that barrier methods are used during sex.

Q Is there other advice about sex and hepatitis C?

answer

Yes, there are practical tips for preventing transmission in general. Remember that blood is the issue so any open cuts or wounds should be covered and it's probably always best to err on the side of caution whenever blood is present just to be safe.

Q Who should I talk to if I have some questions?

answer

It's always a good idea to ask questions – talk to your medical provider or a counselor about ways to stay safe. If at all in doubt it is always better to be safe until you learn all the facts about sexual transmission of hepatitis C.

• Hep C FAQ sheet •

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