

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Information for the Public Regarding Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV) which is found in the blood of infected people. Many people who get hepatitis C carry the virus the rest of their lives. A few of these people become very ill and some have liver failure.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Many people have no symptoms, but can still infect others. If you have hepatitis C, you may have:

- Yellowing of the skin and eyes;
- Loss of appetite;
- Nausea and vomiting;
- Fever;
- A very, very tired feeling; or
- Stomach pain.

How is hepatitis C spread?

You get hepatitis C by direct contact with the blood of a person who has it. For example, a person may get it by sharing needles or any instruments to inject drugs, through exposure to blood at work, or from sex partners.

There is nothing pointing to HCV spread by food or water, or by sneezing, coughing, hugging, sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses or other casual contact.

Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

You are at risk for hepatitis C if you:

- Have ever injected street drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago;
- Have a job that exposes you to human blood;
- Are a hemodialysis patient; or
- Have received a blood transfusion prior to July 1992.
- Were treated for clotting factors with a blood product made before 1987;
- Received a solid organ transplant (e.g., kidney, liver, heart) from an infected donor;

You may be at risk if you:

- Were born to hepatitis C infected mother;
- Ever had sex with a person infected with HCV;
- Live with someone who was infected with HCV and shared items such as razors or toothbrushes that might have had blood on them.

If you have questions about your risk, ask your doctor or call your local health department.

How can you know if you have hepatitis C?

A blood test for HCV can tell if a person has ever been infected. Your doctor may recommend testing if you are at risk for hepatitis C.

Is there any treatment for hepatitis C?

Yes. Some people benefit from treatment. If you have hepatitis C, talk to your doctor about whether you should be treated.

If infected, what should I do to protect others?

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but your choices can protect others.

- Do not share tooth brushes, razors, or other personal care items that could come in contact with blood.
- Cover open sores or other breaks in your skin.
- Do not donate your blood, plasma, body organs, other tissue or sperm.
- If you are injecting drugs, do not share needles nor any instruments used for preparation. Seek treatment for drug use. If you cannot stop, do not reuse or share syringes, water, or drug works.
- If you have one long-term steady sex partner, you do not need to change your sexual practices. There is a low chance of giving hepatitis C to that partner through sexual activity. Talk to your sex partner about hepatitis C.
- If you have more than one sexual partner, reduce the number of partners. Use safer sexual practice and condoms.
- Talk to your partner about hepatitis C.
- If you are a pregnant woman, there is a small chance of transmission to your baby during delivery. Your baby should be tested at the age of one year.

If infected what can I do to protect myself?

- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A. Ask about the vaccine for hepatitis B.
- Stop drinking or reduce alcohol intake drastically.
- See a doctor regularly. Ask if you are a candidate for treatment.
- There is no need to avoid pregnancy or breast feeding, but inform your doctor and baby's doctor about your HCV infection.