

# Hepatitis C

## Fact Sheet

www.cdc.gov/hepatitis  
1-888-4HEP-CDC



### SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- jaundice
- fatigue
- dark urine
- abdominal pain
- loss of appetite
- nausea

80% of persons have no sign or symptoms.

### CAUSE

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

### LONG-TERM EFFECTS

- Chronic infection: 75-85% of infected persons
- Chronic liver disease: 70% of chronically infected persons
- Deaths from chronic liver disease: <3%
- Leading indication for liver transplant

### TRANSMISSION

- Occurs when blood or body fluids from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected.
- HCV is spread through sharing needles or “works” when “shooting” drugs, through needlesticks or sharps exposures on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TESTING BASED ON RISK FOR HCV INFECTION

Persons at risk for HCV infection might also be at risk for infection with hepatitis B virus (HBV) or HIV.

#### Recommendations for Testing Based on Risk for HCV Infection

\* Anyone who wants to get tested should ask their doctor.

PERSONS	RISK OF INFECTION	TESTING RECOMMENDED?
Injecting drug users	High	Yes
Recipients of clotting factors made before 1987	High	Yes
Hemodialysis patients	Intermediate	Yes
Recipients of blood and/or solid organs before 1992	Intermediate	Yes
People with undiagnosed liver problems	Intermediate	Yes
Infants born to infected mothers	Intermediate	After 12-18 months old
Healthcare/Public safety workers	Low	Only after known exposure
People having sex with multiple partners	Low	No *
People having sex with an infected steady partner	Low	No *

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### PREVENTION

- There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.
- Do not shoot drugs. If you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, never share needles, syringes, water, or "works", and get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- If you are a healthcare or public safety worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and sharps; get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- HCV can be spread by sex, but this is very rare. If you are having sex with more than one steady sex partner, use condoms\* correctly and every time to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. You should also get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- If you are HCV positive, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.

### TREATMENT & MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

- HCV positive persons should be evaluated by their doctor for liver disease.
- Interferon and ribavirin are two drugs licensed for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C.
- Interferon can be taken alone or in combination with ribavirin. Combination therapy, using pegylated interferon and ribavirin, is currently the treatment of choice.
- Combination therapy can get rid of the virus in up to 5 out of 10 persons for genotype 1 and in up to 8 out of 10 persons for genotype 2 and 3.
- Drinking alcohol can make you liver disease worse.

### STATISTICS & TRENDS

- Number of new infections per year has declined from an average of 240,000 in the 1980s to about 25,000 in 2001.
- Most infections are due to illegal injection drug use.
- Transfusion-associated cases occurred prior to blood donor screening; now occurs in less than one per million transfused unit of blood.
- Estimated 3.9 million (1.8%) Americans have been infected with HCV, of whom 2.7 million are chronically infected.

\* The efficacy of latex condoms in preventing infection with HCV is unknown, but their proper use may reduce transmission.