

HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C is a viral infection of the liver. There are several types of viral hepatitis, type C (HCV) causing a serious, chronic liver infection. The hepatitis C virus is transmitted in blood and body, usually by blood transfusions, sexual contact, or intravenous drug use. An infected mother can also spread it to her baby during pregnancy. Your risk of contracting the disease is increased if you use drugs, if you received blood or blood products prior to 1992, if you receive kidney dialysis, if you are a health care worker exposed to blood and body fluids, or if you have sexual relations with any high-risk persons.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Usually none
- Fatigue
- Decreased appetite
- *Jaundice* (yellowing of the eyes or skin)

What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose hepatitis C by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam and laboratory blood tests.
- Occasionally, a liver *biopsy* (taking a tissue sample for closer study) may be necessary for diagnosis.
- Treat a chronic infection with regular injections of alpha-interferon.

What *you* can do:

To prevent Hepatitis C:

- Avoid sharing needles; avoid needle use in any situation where the needle may not be sterile. This includes ear and body piercing and tattooing, as well as IV drug use.
- Avoid sexual activity with persons of uncertain health status. For some protection, use condoms correctly and consistently.
- If you are a health care worker, follow routine precautions and handle needles safely.
- Avoid sharing toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles that may be contaminated with blood or body fluids.

If you have been diagnosed with Hepatitis C:

- Have regular check-ups with your doctor, and report any medication use.
- Avoid drinking alcohol.
- Be immunized against hepatitis A if your liver is damaged from hepatitis C.
- For more information contact the Hepatitis Foundation @ 1-800-891-0707.
- To prevent infecting others, do not share needles, avoid unprotected sex, and do not share personal articles that may be contaminated with blood: toothbrush, razor, etc.

What you can expect:

- Most people (about 85%) who become infected with hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives.
- Not all of these people will have symptoms, but most will have some liver damage. There is currently no vaccine available.

Contact your doctor if you belong to any of the high-risk groups mentioned above and have not been tested for hepatitis C.