



HEPATITIS C FACT SHEET

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

Get more information on viral hepatitis by accessing
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis>

Or write:

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
Division of Viral Hepatitis, Mailstop G37
Atlanta, GA 30333

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person.

Is Hepatitis C a serious Problem?

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these persons have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some persons with liver damage due to hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure, which may take many years to develop.

How can you protect yourself from getting infected with HCV and other diseases spread by contact with human blood?

- ✓ Don't ever shoot drugs. If you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you cannot stop, never reuse or share drugs, syringes, cookers, cotton, water, or rinse cups. Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- ✓ Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles. They might have blood on them.
- ✓ If you are a health care worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps. Get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- ✓ Consider the health risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You can get infected if:
 - The tools that are used have someone else's blood on them.
 - The artist or piercer doesn't follow good health practices, such as washing hands and using disposable gloves.
- ✓ HCV can be spread by sex, but this does not occur very often.

Hepatitis C virus is not spread by:

- ✓ breastfeeding
- ✓ hugging
- ✓ kissing
- ✓ food and water
- ✓ casual contact
- ✓ sneezing
- ✓ coughing
- ✓ Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses

Could I already have hepatitis C? Ask your doctor for a blood test for hepatitis C if:

- ✓ You ever injected street drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago.
- ✓ You were treated for clotting problems with a blood product made before 1987.
- ✓ You received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant (e.g. kidney, liver, heart) before July 1992, or you were notified that you received blood that possibly contained HCV.
- ✓ You were on long-term kidney dialysis.

WHY SHOULD I BE TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C? Early diagnosis is important so you can:

- ✓ Be checked for liver disease.
- ✓ Get treatment, if indicated. Drugs are licensed for the treatment of persons with long-term hepatitis C.
- ✓ Learn how you can protect your liver from further harm.
- ✓ Learn how you can prevent spreading HCV to others.