



Hepatitis C/HCV

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C (Hep C/HCV).

What is it? Hep C/HCV is a contagious liver infection that is spread through blood to blood contact. Hep C is the most common blood-borne illness in the U.S.

Why should People Who Use Drugs get tested for Hep C? The number one cause of Hepatitis C transmission is sharing syringes or other equipment used to inject drugs (e.g. cookers)¹

Health education and harm reduction practices (i.e. using sterile supplies) are the only measure of prevention of HCV at the moment, since there is neither a specific vaccination nor an effective prophylaxis against exposure. However, there is very effective treatment for people who contract the Hepatitis C virus. It can take years to see any symptoms from the disease, making it likely that someone may not know they have been infected. Getting tested and treating HCV as soon as possible can help stop the spread of the virus and the progression of liver disease.

Transmission: Most people (50-90% of *Injection Drug Users*) who become infected with HCV/Hep C contract it by sharing syringes or works (cotton, cookers, water, pipes, & straws) with someone who is Hep C/HCV positive.

Hep C/HCV can also be transmitted through sexual contact when there is blood to blood exposure and it can be passed from parent to child during childbirth, but those methods of transmission are much less common.

Using your own works each time will help keep you safe.²

Acute Vs. Chronic Hep C/HCV:

Acute: Sometimes people who are infected with Hep C (about 25-30%) get infected and their body clears the virus on its own. This means they don't end up with a chronic infection, but they will still test positive on an antibody test.

Chronic: most people infected with Hepatitis C do not clear the virus and the virus becomes a chronic liver disease.³

Who should get tested and when?

Getting tested for hepatitis C is important because treatments can cure most (up to 95% of) cases of hepatitis C in 8 to 12 weeks. The problem with getting treatment for all who need it is that more than 50% of adults in the U.S. who have Hep C don't even know that they have it because it can take years or decades to develop symptoms. These symptoms are usually caused by the liver finally deteriorating due to the Hepatitis C Virus.

Testing: The CDC recommends that the following people receive at least 1 test in their lifetime.

- all adults 18+
- all pregnant people should be tested during each pregnancy (there is a 5% chance of passing it

¹ "Hepatitis C - FAQs, Statistics, Data, & Guidelines | CDC." 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>.

² "Hepatitis C Questions and Answers for Health Professionals | CDC." 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/hcvfaq.htm#section2>.

³ "What is Hepatitis C - FAQ | CDC." 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm>.

from parent to child during childbirth)

The following people should be tested regardless of age:

- People with HIV
- People who ever injected drugs and shared syringes, or other drug preparation equipment, including those who injected once or a few times many years ago
- People who have received a tattoo outside of a professional parlor (e.g. Prison tattoos, tattoo parties)
- People with certain medical conditions, including:
 - people who ever received maintenance hemodialysis
 - people with persistently abnormal ALT levels
- Prior recipients of transfusions or organ transplants, including:
 - people who received clotting factor concentrates produced before 1987
 - people who received a transfusion of blood or blood components before July 1992
 - people who received an organ transplant before July 1992
 - people who were notified that they received blood from a donor who later tested positive for HCV infection

Routine periodic testing for people with ongoing risk factors, while risk factors persist:

- People who currently inject drugs and share needles, syringes, or other drug preparation equipment
- People with certain medical conditions, including: people who ever received maintenance hemodialysis

How soon after exposure should someone get tested? After exposure it can take 8-11 weeks for the HCV virus to show up on an antibody test. There is a special test called a nucleic acid test (NAT) that will pick up the virus 1-2 weeks after exposure)

What kind of tests do you need? HCV Antibody Test AKA the Anti-HCV test - a simple blood test that tests your blood for Hepatitis C antibodies. (Anyone who currently has or previously had the virus will test positive on this test).

Hepatitis C RNA Quantitative Test: In order to tell if you have an active infection, your provider will order a Hepatitis C RNA Quantitative Test. (This test will only be positive if you have an active Hepatitis C infection. If this test comes back positive you should discuss treatment options with the medical provider that tested you)⁴

Getting treated for Hepatitis C: Hep C/HCV has 7 seven unique strains (genotypes). The most common in the U.S. are: 1 (1a & 1b) which is the most common genotype in the U.S. and worldwide, and 2, which is the second most common in the U.S. Not as many people in the U.S. have genotype 3, but it is more common among IV drug users than it is in the general public and even with new Antiviral treatments is still the most treatment resistant.⁵

Treatment is recommended for all people over 3 years old (including non pregnant people) with acute or chronic hepatitis c.

Current treatment usually involves only 8-12 weeks of antiviral medications (with few side effects) that cures 90% of Hepatitis C infections.⁶

⁴ "What is Hepatitis C - FAQ | CDC." 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm#E1>.

⁵ "Genotypes of hepatitis C." n.d. Hepatitis C Trust. Accessed January 31, 2023.

<http://hepctrust.org.uk/information/about-hepatitis-c-virus/genotypes-hepatitis-c>.

⁶ "Hepatitis C - FAQs, Statistics, Data, & Guidelines | CDC." 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>.

Where can I go to get tested and/or treated for Hep C? If you have no insurance there are health centers that can help with testing and treatment. You can find a list of them here:

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/immunization/active-317-adult-provider-sites.shtml>

For help getting tested for hep C or getting treatment reach out to:

MAP's Director of Health Services,
Anna McConnell
call/text/signal 207-319-8079

References

- "Genotypes of hepatitis C." n.d. Hepatitis C Trust. Accessed January 31, 2023.
<http://hepctrust.org.uk/information/about-hepatitis-c-virus/genotypes-hepatitis-c>.
- "Hepatitis C - FAQs, Statistics, Data, & Guidelines | CDC." 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
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