



HEPATITIS C INFORMATION SHEET

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver caused by a variety of things including viruses and toxic substances such as alcohol. When the liver inflammation is due to hepatitis C virus (HCV), the condition is known as hepatitis C. Most cases of acute hepatitis C are mild; often there are no symptoms. Some people may have flu-like symptoms such as fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, muscle aches and joint pains. Others may have yellowing of the skin and the white of the eyes (jaundice), nausea and vomiting. About 15% of those with hepatitis C have a short term infection that goes away by itself and never returns. In about 85% of cases the infection becomes chronic, meaning the virus stays in the liver, replicates and slowly attacks the organ over a period of decades. About 10-20% may develop liver cirrhosis and 1-5% develop liver cancer. Approximately 25% of persons with the virus will develop serious liver disease such as cirrhosis or liver cancer over 20-40 years.

How is hepatitis C spread?

- Injection drug use
- Intranasal cocaine use
- Sex with multiple partners
- Body piercing
- Chronic hemodialysis
- Occupational exposure (eg, needle stick, scalpel cut)
- Maternal-newborn exposure
- Recipient of clotting factors before 1987
- Recipient of blood products or organ transplantation before 1992

Can hepatitis C be treated?

YES. Some people with mild hepatitis may only require a nutritious diet, abstinence from alcohol and regular exercise in addition to regular doctor visits. For others with hepatitis C, medications may be indicated. We recommend that you let your physician review your laboratory test results, as he/she is in a better position to evaluate your overall health status.

How is blood tested for HCV?

All donated blood is tested for HCV before it is transfused to a patient. A sample of the donor's blood is tested using two screening tests. One detects antibodies to HCV and is called an enzyme immunoassay (EIA); the other detects viral genetic material and is called a Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAT). All blood from donors who test repeatedly reactive (positive) on the EIA test or the NAT test is destroyed and is NOT used for transfusion. For the purposes of counseling, further confirmatory tests may be performed. If the screening and confirmatory tests are positive, a donor is considered infected with HCV and is permanently deferred from donating blood.

What should I do if I am infected with HCV?

Donors who have **positive** anti-HCV supplemental tests (RIBA and/or NAT) should take several steps to protect their health and the health of others.

DO call a Donor Counselor at 1-800-289-4923 if you have questions and concerns.

DO see a doctor promptly for medical evaluation, even if you do not feel sick, and obtain follow-up testing, additional information and advice on treatment considerations.

DO inform your doctor or dentist about your test result before having treatment.

DO discuss any medications you take with your physician regarding their effect on the liver. This includes over-the-counter drugs.

DO limit or abstain from drinking alcohol.

DO engage in a lifestyle of nutritious diet and regular exercise.

DO NOT donate blood, plasma, semen or sperm, body organs, or other tissues.

DO NOT share needles or personal items that can puncture the skin and become contaminated with your blood such as needles, toothbrushes, nail files, scissors, or shaving instruments.



There is information and support available to help you understand the disease and how to live with it. You may consider joining a support group for people with HCV infection. Support groups can help people cope with being HCV infected. Here are some resources:

- Hep C Connection: 1-800-522-HEPC (4372) or visit the web site at www.hepc-connection.org. Hep C Connection is a hepatitis C information, support and awareness resource for people with HCV and their families.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hepatitis web site at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis or call their information line at 1-888-4HEPCDC.
- State and local health departments may also have programs and services that can assist you.