

Frequently Asked Questions About Hepatitis C

Q What is hepatitis C?

Answer

Hepatitis C is an infectious liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). The virus attacks the cells of the liver, causing inflammation that results in damage of the liver tissue. Hepatitis C can either be "Acute" (short-term) or "Chronic" (long-term).

Q How is hepatitis C spread?

Answer

The Hepatitis C virus is transmitted, or spread, by direct blood to blood contact.

The most common modes of transmission include:

- Use of non-sterile equipment to inject or snort drugs
- Receipt of donated blood, blood products, or organs prior to 1992
- Occupational exposure to blood or needles
- Birth to an HCV-infected mother
- Receipt of an unsafe (non-sterile) tattoo or piercing (prison or street)
- Sharing personal items contaminated with infected blood such as razors or toothbrushes
- Unprotected intercourse with an HCV-infected person

Hepatitis C is *NOT* transmitted by casual contact such as hugging, kissing, sharing eating utensils and drinking glasses, coughing or sneezing.

Q How will I know if I have hepatitis C?

Answer

Individuals infected with hepatitis C are often unaware of their illness because most people do not experience any specific symptoms.

However, symptoms may include:

- Flu-like symptoms
- Abdominal pain or bloating
- Muscle and joint pain
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Dark Urine
- Clay colored stools
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

Q What are the effects of hepatitis C?

Answer

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), hepatitis C will become a chronic infection in approximately 55-85% of those infected with the virus. In general, the disease seems to progress slowly over 10 to 40 years. Many people who are chronically infected do not even know they carry the virus until complications arise.

Conditions such as cirrhosis (scarring) and fibrosis are not uncommon among people with hepatitis C. These conditions make it difficult for the liver to function properly. In addition, HCV infection is associated with an increased chance of developing hepatocellular carcinoma, a type of liver cancer.

Q How can I protect myself from hepatitis C?

Answer

HCV Prevention Tips:

- Do not share any items used for either IV or non-IV drug use
- Ensure only new needles and ink are used when getting a tattoo, piercing, or acupuncture. Also confirm that all equipment used has been sterilized.
- Do not share any personal items such as razors, toothbrushes, or pierced earrings (any items that may contain blood).
- Cover open cuts or wounds
- Although uncommon, a mother can transmit hepatitis C to her baby during pregnancy or birth. Breastfeeding however, is believed to be safe.
- HCV can be spread by sex, but is rare. If you are having sex with multiple partners, use latex barriers correctly and every time to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.
- If you are HCV positive, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.



Resources

For more information about hepatitis C, please refer to the following:

El Dorado County Health Services Department

Communicable Disease Section

Website: http://www.edcgov.us/Government/PublicHealth/Communicable_Disease/

Phone: (530) 621-6320

Address: 931 Spring Street Placerville, CA 95667

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/C/index.htm>

HCV Advocate

<http://www.hcvadvocate.org/>



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