

FACT SHEET

Hepatitis C Virus

Hepatitis C is an inflammation of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus:
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HCV/index.htm>

- Cause:** Hepatitis C virus (HCV).
- Symptoms:** Some individuals experience appetite loss, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, vague stomach pain, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes). Most people infected with Hepatitis C do not show any symptoms and the signs and symptoms are indistinguishable from hepatitis A or hepatitis B viral infections.
- Spread:** Hepatitis C is transmitted by exposure to blood from an infected individual. Donated blood has been screened for antibodies to Hepatitis C since 1990. Transfusion now accounts for less than 5% of acute Hepatitis C infection.
- Risks:** Anyone who has had an injection with unsterilized needles/syringes in a healthcare setting; anyone who has been an injectable drug user; anyone who has received unscreened donated blood, blood products or organs, anyone who has a long history of hemodialysis, anyone who has received body piercings or tattoos from unsterile equipment, healthcare workers who have had a needle stick exposure, anyone exposed to blood from someone with known HCV, HIV infected men who have sex with men, and children born to mothers with HCV infection. The risk of transmission by household contact and sexual contact has not been well defined and appears at low risk.
- Incubation:** Symptoms may appear from two weeks to six months after exposure, but usually within six to nine weeks.
- Contagious Period:** People are at risk of transmitting from one or more weeks before onset of symptoms. However, since the majority of people infected with Hepatitis C do not have symptoms, the period of communicability is indeterminate. People remain contagious as long as they carry the virus.
- Precautions:** Use gloves to handle any blood or body fluids; good hand washing hygiene.
- Reportable:** By the provider or lab to the local or state health department

Diagnosis and Treatment:

Specific lab for the Hepatitis C carrier state has been developed. Some people may not test positive until six to nine months after illness. Children who are diagnosed with Hepatitis C infection should be referred to a pediatric hepatologist for monitoring and treatment. For people with chronic Hepatitis C infection, interferon alpha therapy has been beneficial. Interferon and ribavirin combination therapy is also an approved treatment. The combination therapy improves the sustained response. New drugs have been approved by the FDA for the treatment of HCV; significant side effects happen that require monitoring.

Prevention:

People with Hepatitis C should be aware that their blood and possibly other body fluids are potentially infective. Sharing toothbrushes, razors, needles, or other objects that may become contaminated with blood should not be shared with other people. Also, they should not donate blood and should inform their dental and medical providers so that proper precautions can be followed.