From Living with HIV and Hepatitis C Co-infection

What is co-infection?

Co-infection means a person is living with more than one infection at a time.

HIV and hepatitis C co-infection means that a person has both HIV and hepatitis C.

This booklet provides information specific to HIV and hepatitis C co-infection. There are many other co-infections, such as HIV and hepatitis B, HIV and tuberculosis (TB) or hepatitis C and hepatitis B.

CATIE offers information on HIV infection and/or hepatitis C infection. In addition, we provide information on other co-infections that are common among people with HIV. Check out www.catie.ca or contact CATIE at 1-800-263-1638.

What are HIV and AIDS?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It is a virus that weakens your immune system, your body’s built-in defence against disease and illness. Without treatment, HIV can make it harder for your body to fight off other diseases and illnesses. Over time, you can become sick with life-threatening infections. This is the most serious stage of HIV infection, called AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome).

There’s no cure for HIV, but with the right treatment, care and support, most people with HIV can stay healthy and live long lives.

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis viruses infect the liver. There are three types of hepatitis viruses that are common in Canada: hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. These viruses are different; they are passed in different ways; they produce different symptoms and require different treatments. This booklet focuses on hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is a virus that affects your liver and causes damage to this important organ. This type of damage is called fibrosis in earlier stages and cirrhosis in later stages. Over time, the damaged liver isn’t able to work as well. In severe cases, cirrhosis can lead to liver failure and/or liver cancer.

After infection with hepatitis C, the body tries to fight the virus. In some people, the body is able to clear the virus without treatment. If the virus is still in the body after six months, the infection becomes chronic and stays in the body unless you take medication to treat it.
There is a cure for hepatitis C. Hepatitis C treatment can completely clear the virus from the body. But there is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C and the body does not develop protection against the virus. It is possible to become infected again.

**How do you know whether you are co-infected?**

A person can be co-infected and not know it. Both HIV and hepatitis C are slow-acting viruses. People can be infected for years with either virus without having any signs or symptoms of illness.

Tests are the only way to find out for sure if you have HIV and hepatitis C. The test for HIV is a blood test. Hepatitis C is detected with two blood tests. The first test is called an antibody test and the second test is called an RNA test (also called a PCR test or a viral load test). Only the RNA test can tell you if you currently have hepatitis C.
Disclaimer

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV- and hepatitis C-related illness and the treatments in question.

CATIE provides information resources to help people living with HIV and/or hepatitis C who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad a range of sources as possible. We strongly urge users to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

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Information on safer drug use is presented as a public health service to help people make healthier choices to reduce the spread of HIV, viral hepatitis and other infections. It is not intended to encourage or promote the use or possession of illegal drugs.

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