

Hepatitis C Teaching Toolkit

Chee Mamuk, Aboriginal Program, BC Centre for Disease Control, took the lead role in developing this teaching toolkit with the assistance of Healing Our Spirit BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society.

We have taken, as our theme, “Walk the Red Road.” In many First Nations cultures, the Red Road is the path leading to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health.

The toolkit addresses the issue of hepatitis C in Aboriginal communities. By taking steps to inform themselves and to minimize risk to themselves and others, people using these materials can “Walk the Red Road” to better health and well-being.

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The hepatitis C ribbon represents our dedication to the memory of those who have passed and our commitment to the struggle to defeat this disease.

Revisions included in the 2008 edition have been in partnership with the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE), Healing Our Spirit (HOS), and Hepatitis Services, BC Centre for Disease Control.

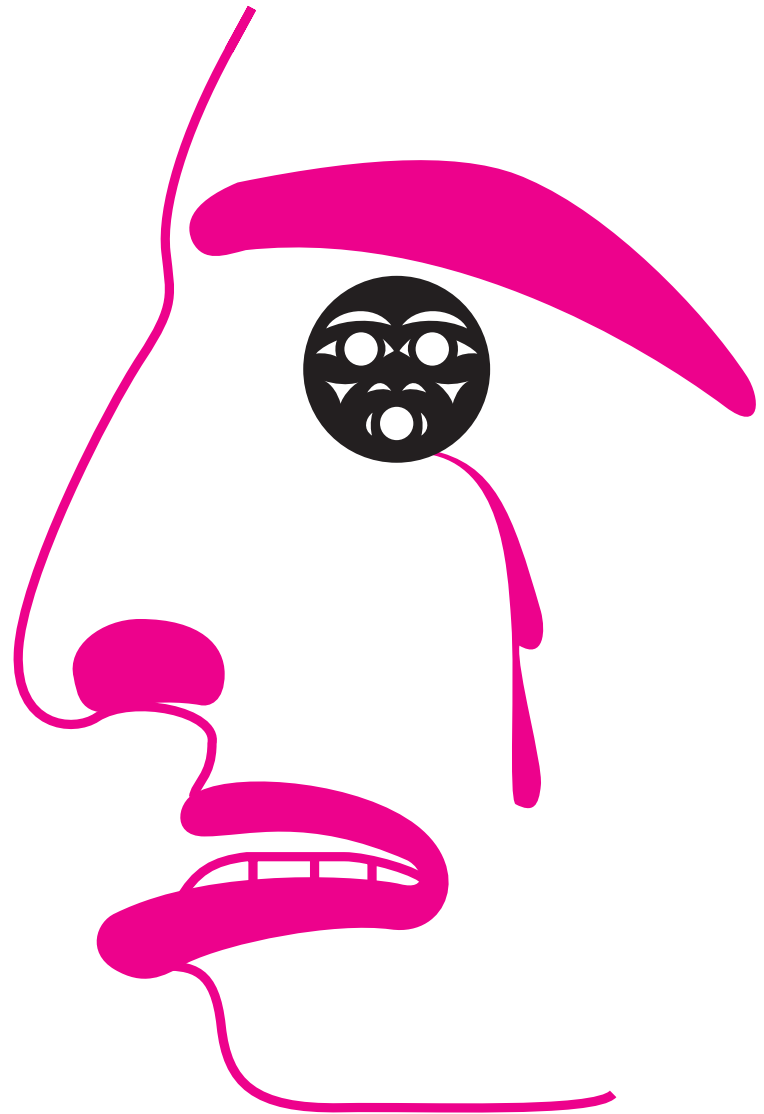
Original Artwork: Damien George Graphic Designer: Alistair Stevens

Walk the Red Road

Why are Aboriginal people at risk for infection with hepatitis C virus?

Witness the Tears of Aboriginal People

- 1 Nomadic lifestyle
- 1 Residential school syndrome
- 1 Loss of culture and spirituality
- 1 Language and literacy issues
- 1 Loss of traditional parenting skills
- 1 Breakdown of the family
- 1 Unhealthy foster care
- 1 Sexual abuse
- 1 Low self esteem
- 1 Isolation
- 1 Lack of awareness
- 1 Alcohol use
- 1 IV drug use
- 1 Time in prison
- 1 Tattooing
- 1 Poor access to health services

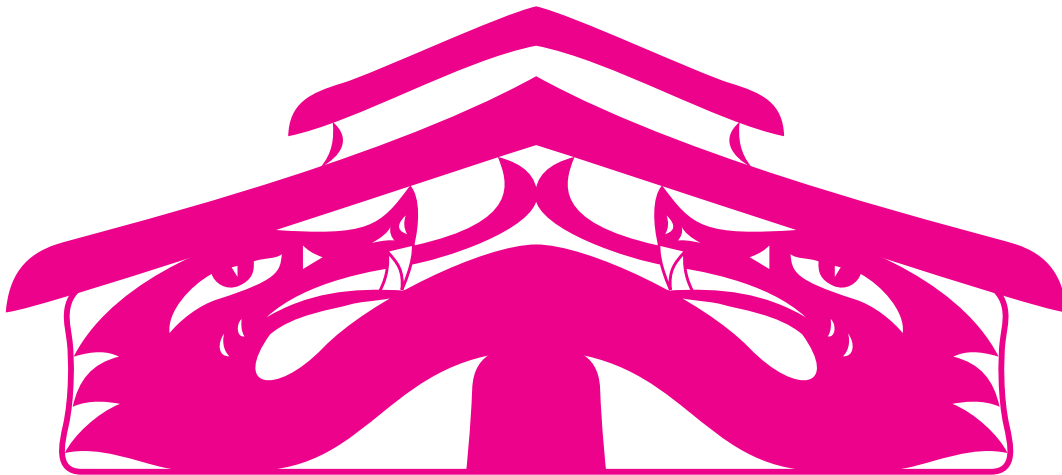


The Grieving Mask represents the sense of sorrow many people feel over the circumstances that have put Aboriginal people at high risk.

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What does a healthy liver do?

- 1 The liver makes and stores nutrients and energy from the foods you eat.
- 1 The liver helps the body clear out harmful things such as drugs and alcohol.
- 1 The liver makes the things that help your blood clot when you are bleeding (clotting factors).
- 1 The liver makes hormones for your body.
- 1 The liver makes sure that your body remains healthy.
- 1 A healthy liver is necessary for the healthy life. Respect your liver.



The Healing House: a traditional coastal longhouse. The serpents on the front represents "cleansing" in some First Nations cultures. The serpents can also represent, here, the Caduceus, the symbol of western medicine.

Walk the Red Road

What is Hepatitis C Virus?

- 1 Hepatitis = “hepat” (liver) + “itis” (inflammation) – inflammation of the liver.
- 1 Hepatitis C virus is a virus that is spread by blood-to-blood contact with someone who has the virus in their blood.
- 1 A virus is a very small organism that needs to take over your cells to reproduce. When the virus reproduces it damages your liver cells.
- 1 The hepatitis C virus will cause liver inflammation.
- 1 The inflammation can cause scarring in the liver and prevent the liver from working properly.
- 1 About 15-20% of the people with hepatitis C virus will have liver damage over many decades.
- 1 Hepatitis C is spreading quickly among our Aboriginal people, especially among drug users who share needles.
- 1 One hepatitis C virus may be different from another and you can be infected with hepatitis C more than once.
- 1 There is effective treatment that can successfully clear the hepatitis C virus in infected people if they can tolerate the treatment.
- 1 There is no vaccine.

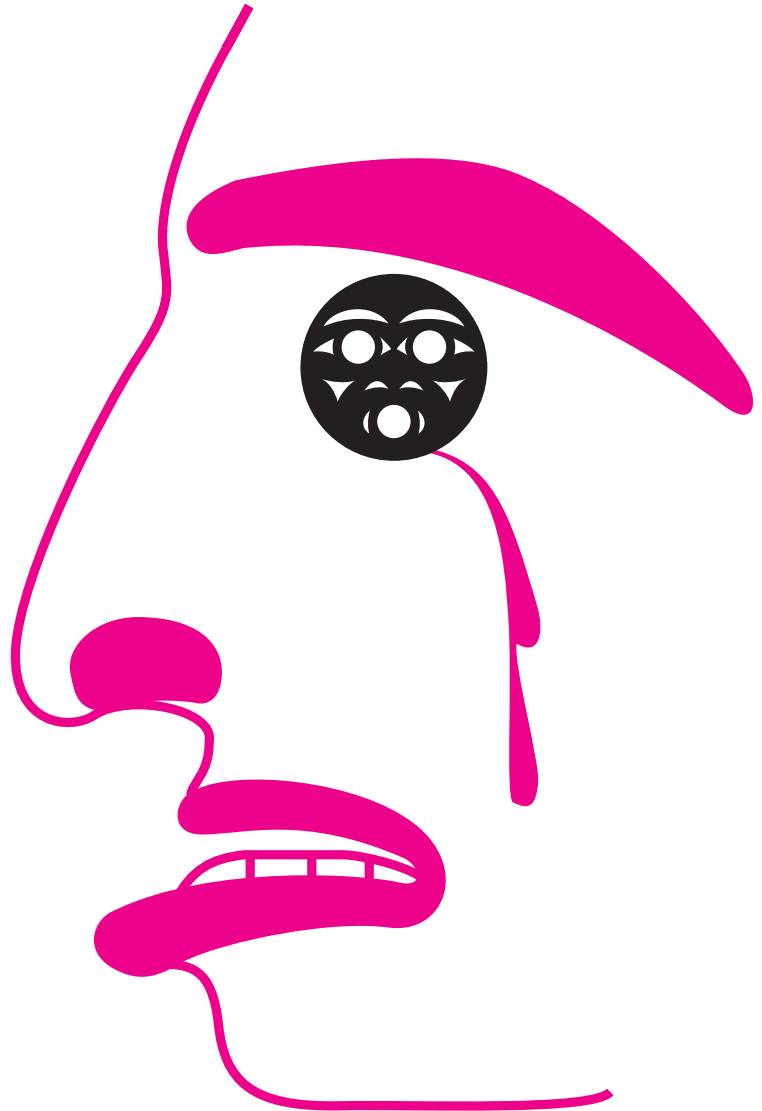


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Some facts about Hepatitis C

- 1 Hepatitis C is this country's most common blood-borne disease, infecting about 1 out of every 100 people.
- 1 About 250,000 - 300,000 people in Canada, 110,000 in Ontario and 60,000 people in British Columbia are infected with the hepatitis C virus right now and that number is growing.
- 1 Hepatitis C infection is about seven times higher in the Canadian Aboriginal population.
- 1 Some of our Aboriginal people may be infected with hepatitis C & don't know it.
- 1 Some of our people who are infected with hepatitis C may be infected with other viruses too, such as HIV/ AIDS or hepatitis B. The term for this is "co-infection".



The Grieving Mask represents the sense of sorrow many people feel over the circumstances that have put Aboriginal people at high risk.

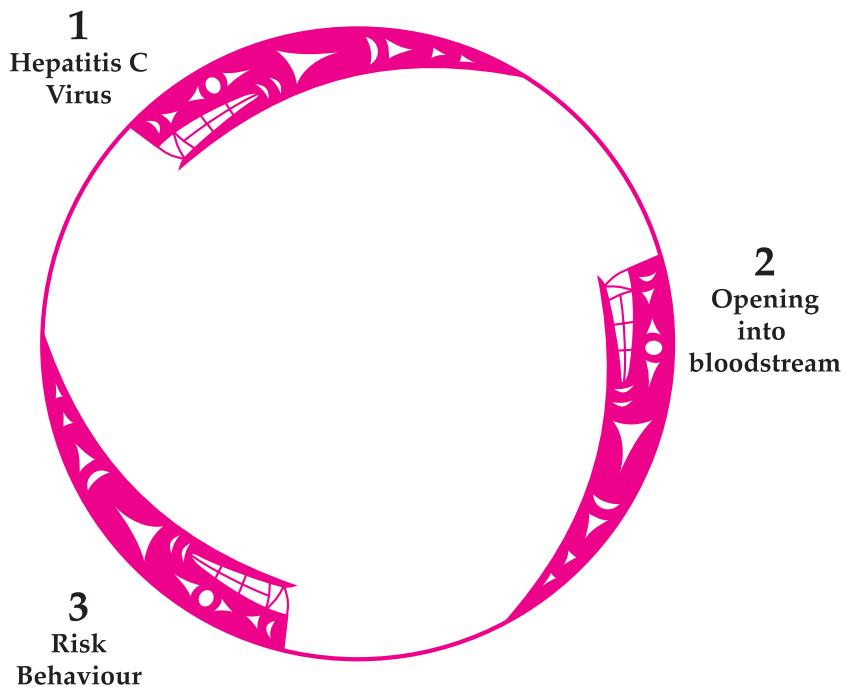
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Transmission

Blood to blood contact with infected blood

- 1 Hepatitis C is usually spread by blood-to-blood contact with infected blood.
- 1 The risk of passing on the Hepatitis C virus via other body fluids such as semen or vaginal secretions is very low but is not zero.
- 1 Breast milk is safe for your baby. Bleeding/cracked nipples may increase the risk of transmission. Talk to your doctor.

Risk of Infection with Hepatitis C



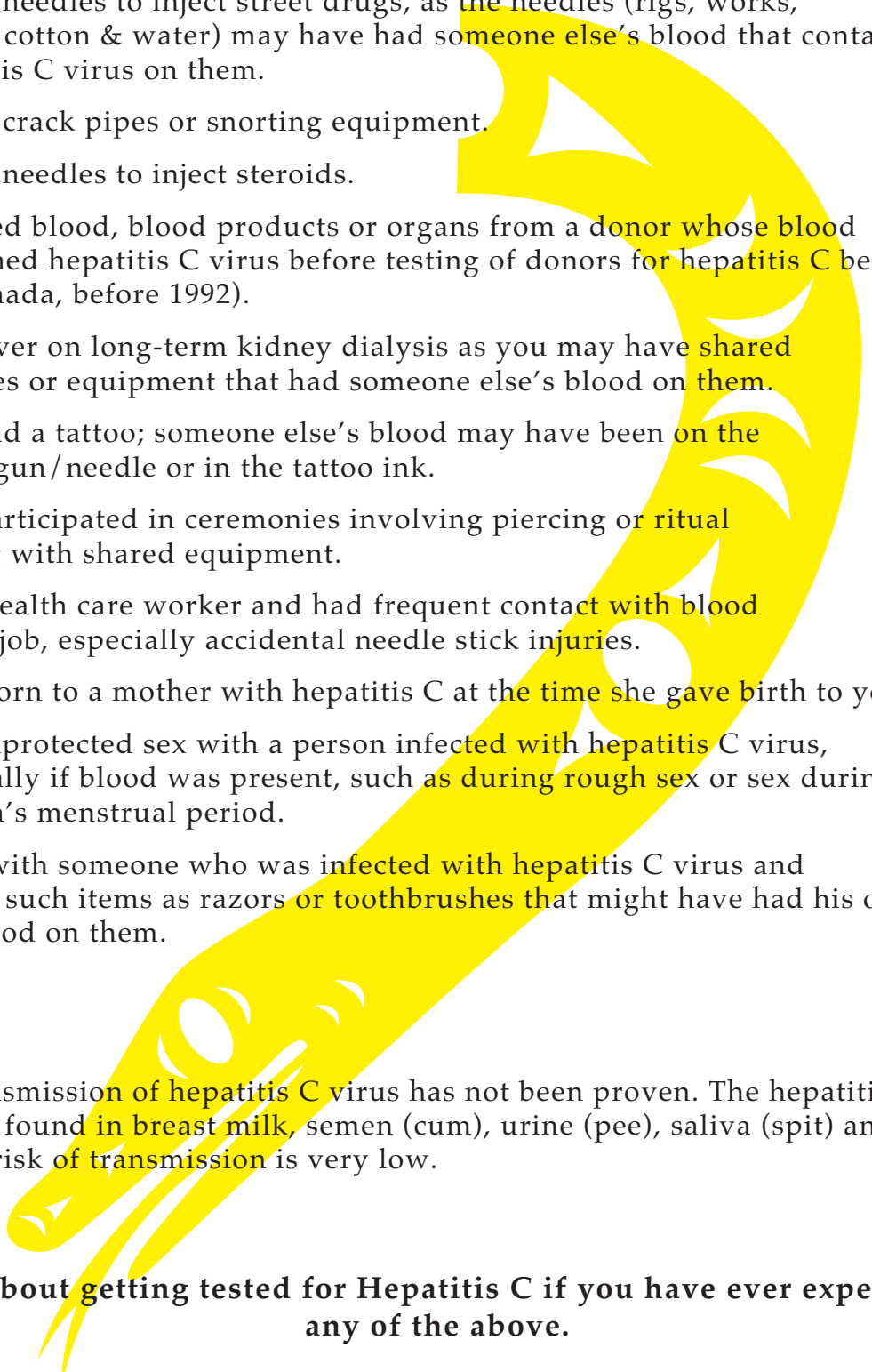
1 + 2 + 3 = Risk of infection

1. Hepatitis C virus must be present in blood
2. Opening into bloodstream such as a cut, puncture or tear
3. Activity that moves Hepatitis C virus into the bloodstream

Spirit Bear: Among some First Nation cultures, bear represents strength and agility. The White Spirit Bear of coastal British Columbia, legend says, was created by Raven as a reminder of the last ice age and represents peace and harmony.

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You may be infected with Hepatitis C if you:

- 
- 1 Shared needles to inject street drugs, as the needles (rigs, works, spoon, cotton & water) may have had someone else's blood that contained hepatitis C virus on them.
 - 1 Shared crack pipes or snorting equipment.
 - 1 Shared needles to inject steroids.
 - 1 Received blood, blood products or organs from a donor whose blood contained hepatitis C virus before testing of donors for hepatitis C began (in Canada, before 1992).
 - 1 Were ever on long-term kidney dialysis as you may have shared supplies or equipment that had someone else's blood on them.
 - 1 Ever had a tattoo; someone else's blood may have been on the tattoo gun/needle or in the tattoo ink.
 - 1 Ever participated in ceremonies involving piercing or ritual cutting with shared equipment.
 - 1 Are a health care worker and had frequent contact with blood on the job, especially accidental needle stick injuries.
 - 1 Were born to a mother with hepatitis C at the time she gave birth to you.
 - 1 Had unprotected sex with a person infected with hepatitis C virus, especially if blood was present, such as during rough sex or sex during a woman's menstrual period.
 - 1 Lived with someone who was infected with hepatitis C virus and shared such items as razors or toothbrushes that might have had his or her blood on them.

Oral transmission of hepatitis C virus has not been proven. The hepatitis C virus has been found in breast milk, semen (cum), urine (pee), saliva (spit) and tears but the risk of transmission is very low.

Think about getting tested for Hepatitis C if you have ever experienced any of the above.

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Hepatitis C is not spread by:

- 1 Sneezing or coughing
- 1 Shaking hands
- 1 Hugging and kissing
- 1 Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses or bottles
- 1 Swimming in public swimming pool when you have cuts or scrapes
- 1 Being bitten by mosquito
- 1 Skin contact by others with your body fluids, such as spit, urine (pee), feces (poo) or vomit
- 1 Sitting on a toilet seat

The risk of spreading hepatitis C virus through everyday activities and contact is very low.

It is okay to show affection and share in ceremonies such as sweats, smudging and dancing.



Sacred Sweat: The eagle and the wolf, symbols of power and community form the walls of the sweat lodge. The heated stones, thrown up from the centre of Mother Earth, are the Grandmothers, the caregivers.

Walk the Red Road

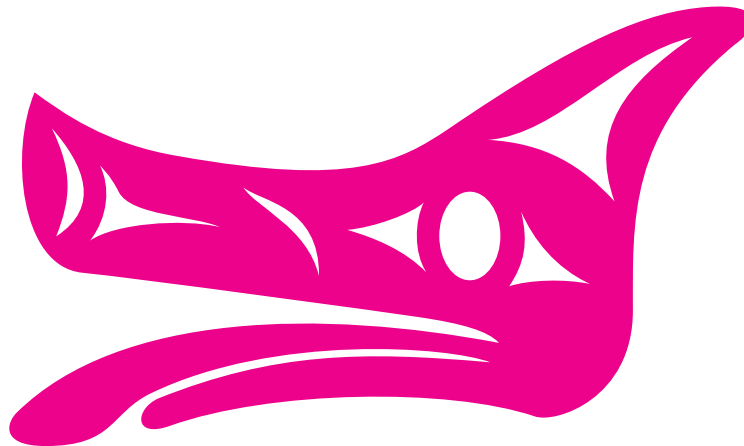
Symptoms/signs of Hepatitis C

Some people feel well, have no symptoms and don't know they have hepatitis C virus in their blood. Only about 25% of people who get a new hepatitis C infection will become ill. Most will either not know they are infected or only develop liver damage or other symptoms decades after infection.

Symptoms when present may include:

- 1 Fatigue (feeling tired).
- 1 Jaundice (yellow skin or eyes).
- 1 Nausea (sick to your stomach).
- 1 Muscle and joint pain.
- 1 Hair loss.
- 1 Skin rashes.
- 1 Headaches.
- 1 Swollen hands and feet.
- 1 Trouble sleeping.
- 1 Weight loss or loss of appetite.
- 1 Dark urine (pee) / light coloured stool (poo).
- 1 Some people may begin to experience unexplained fatigue, lack of energy, or stomach problems.

Hepatitis C virus affects each person differently

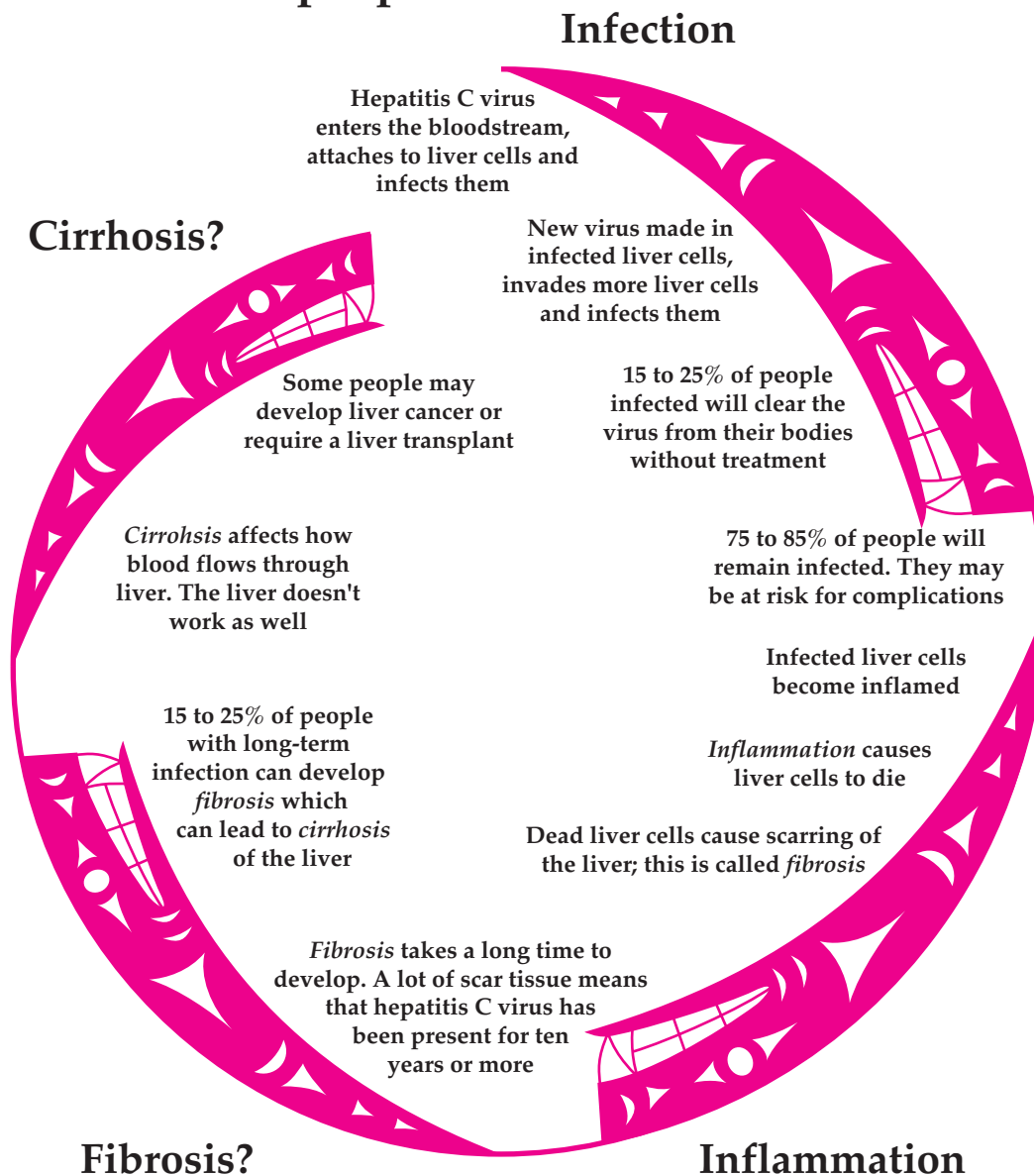


Wolf: for many First Nation cultures, wolf represents family and togetherness.

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What can happen after a person is infected with hepatitis C virus?

Treatment can successfully clear the virus in some people



Walk the Red Road

Living with Hepatitis C

To help reduce damage to your liver:

- 1 Cut back on or avoid drinking alcohol; alcohol hurts your liver.
- 1 Make sure your doctor knows what medications you take.
- 1 Tylenol can affect your liver. Only use Tylenol if your doctor says it's okay to do so.
- 1 Take medications on time; they will be more effective.
- 1 Use over the counter medications carefully. Read the labels or have someone do it for you. Talk to your pharmacist about drug interactions.
- 1 See your doctor and dentist regularly; consider telling them that you have hepatitis C so they can better care for you.
- 1 Ask your doctor or public health nurse about hepatitis A and B and pneumococcal vaccines, and any other vaccines that you may be eligible for.

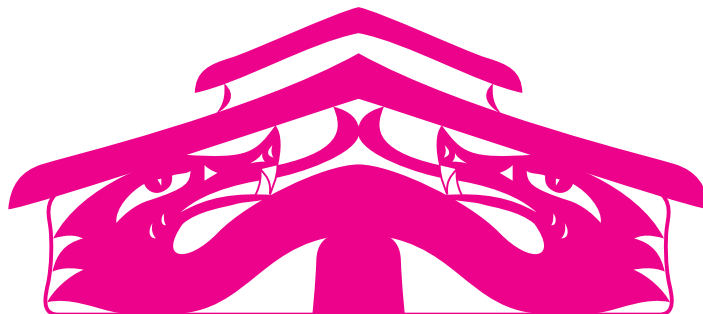
To help your body and mind:

- 1 Get plenty of rest and eat healthy foods.
- 1 Exercise moderately and regularly; it relieves stress and increases your energy.
- 1 Manage stress and keep a sense of humour.

To help protect others:

- 1 Discuss issues about pregnancy and breastfeeding with your doctor or nurse.
- 1 You can breastfeed your child if you have hepatitis C. Bleeding/cracked nipples may increase the risk of transmission. Talk to your doctor.
- 1 Bandage all open cuts and sores until healed.

Learn as much as you can about hepatitis C so you can make wise choices about how you want to live your life.



The Healing House: a traditional coastal longhouse. The serpents on the front represents "cleansing" in some First Nations cultures. The serpents can also represent, here, the Caduceus, the symbol of western medicine.

BC Hepatitis Services
BCCDC
www.bccdc.org
1-866-660-1676

Canadian Liver Foundation
CLF
www.liver.ca
1-800-856-7266

HepCBC
www.hepcbc.ca
(250) 595-3892

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Co-Infection

Co-infection refers to having more than one infection at the same time

HIV/HCV co-infection:

- 1 People can get HIV and HCV in similar ways. For example, both can be transmitted through sharing drug using equipment. People with HIV should be tested for Hep C infection and vice versa.
- 1 Some people may be infected with both HIV and hepatitis C. Liver damage happens faster in people who are also infected with HIV.

Other examples of co-infection:

- 1 Infection with hepatitis A and hepatitis B can make hepatitis C worse. You can get a free vaccine to prevent hepatitis A and B infection.
- 1 Some people may have tuberculosis (TB) and HIV and hepatitis C infections at the same time.



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Steps on the Red Road: Harm Reduction for Injection Drug Users with Hepatitis C

If you use injection drugs, there are some steps you can take to reduce risks to your health and the health of other people. Each one of these steps will help a little. Taking two or more steps will help even more.

1. Stop sharing needles or other drug equipment; this will reduce the risk to you and other people.
2. Always use a new needle.
3. Stop using needles for drugs (you could try eating, smoking, or snorting to give your veins a rest).
4. Using a sterile needle is not enough. All of the rigs and other materials need to be new / sterile to stop the spread of hepatitis.
5. Do not share snorting equipment or crack pipes. Use your own mouthpiece if you are sharing a crack pipe.
6. Getting clean is hard but it's the best way to improve your health. There are people who can help you
7. Alcohol harms the liver; reduce or stop drinking alcohol. There are people who can help you



Sacred Sweat: The eagle and the wolf, symbols of power and community form the walls of the sweat lodge. The heated stones, thrown up from the centre of Mother Earth, are the Grandmothers, the caregivers.

Walk the Red Road

Treatment of Hepatitis C

There are different types or strains of hepatitis C virus. These are called genotypes. Length and success of treatment may depend on the type of genotype you have.

Combination therapy:

- 1 Combination of pegylated interferon and ribavirin is the current best treatment. New treatments are being developed.
- 1 Overall about 50-60% of those taking pegylated interferon/ ribavirin clear the virus
~45% of those infected with genotype 1 with 48 weeks treatment and
~75% of those infected with genotype 2, 3 with 24 weeks of treatment.
- 1 Pegylated interferon is injected weekly and ribavirin pills are taken daily.
- 1 Not all people need to be treated right away.
- 1 Treatment can be very hard on the body, but people can get through it with the help and support of your health practitioner and other people such as friends, family and support groups.
- 1 Both you and your partner must use effective birth control while taking combination therapy as ribavirin can cause severe damage to a developing baby. Ribavirin must not be used when a woman might become pregnant. Men should always use a condom when they are taking ribavirin.
- 1 For some people, combination therapy may successfully clear the virus from the body.
- 1 People can get a new hepatitis infection after clearing the virus through treatment if they continue engaging in high risk behaviour.

Alternative therapies:

- 1 There is no scientific evidence that alternative medicines are effective at curing hepatitis C: some may help symptoms.
- 1 Always let your doctor or nurse know you are taking or plan to be using any herbal remedy or alternative medicine.
- 1 Some herbs can cause serious problems to your liver.
- 1 Vitamin and mineral supplements may be helpful. Ask your doctor.
- 1 Other alternative therapies, such as acupuncture or massage may improve your sense of well-being.

Traditional Medicines:

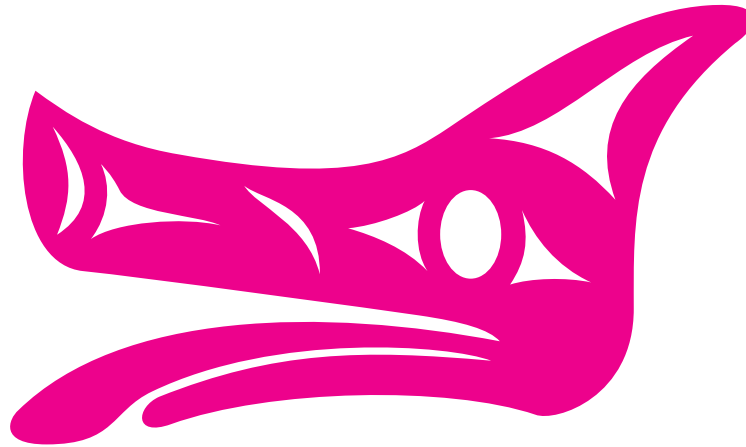
- 1 The medicine wheel reminds us that being well is more than just physical; the spiritual and emotional well-being of a person can affect the way the person feels.
- 1 Sweat lodge, smudging, ceremonial brushings and other spiritual and cultural practices may help to make a person feel better.
- 1 Sacred healing herbs include sweet grass, sage, cedar and juniper.

Walk the Red Road

How can I protect others?

People who have been diagnosed with hepatitis C do not need to become socially isolated. Take the following precautions to avoid spreading the virus.

- 1 Do not donate blood, semen, body organs or tissues.
- 1 Do not share razors or toothbrushes, nail files, clippers or other personal items that may have blood on them.
- 1 If you use drugs, do not share needles (rigs, fix, water), snorting equipment or crack pipes (use your own mouthpiece).
- 1 Consider informing health professionals who care for you that you are infected with the virus.
- 1 Inform your sexual partner(s). Use condoms for oral, vaginal and anal sex.
- 1 Do not use a tattoo parlour unless they use only factory sealed ink and new needles just for you.
- 1 Use household bleach (nine parts water to one part bleach) or some other cleaning agent to clean areas where your blood has spilled.



Wolf: for many First Nation cultures, wolf represents family and togetherness.

Walk the Red Road

Standard Precautions

Standard precautions are steps we all should take to protect ourselves by preventing contact with the blood or body fluids of other people.

We use standard precautions because you can't tell if a person is infected with hepatitis C virus or other blood-borne disease.

The best thing to do is be cautious of every person's body fluids.

These body fluids include blood, semen and vaginal secretions. The most important body fluid to avoid contact with is blood.

Teach others, especially children, about risks of viruses and how they can be safer using standard precautions.

Steps to take:

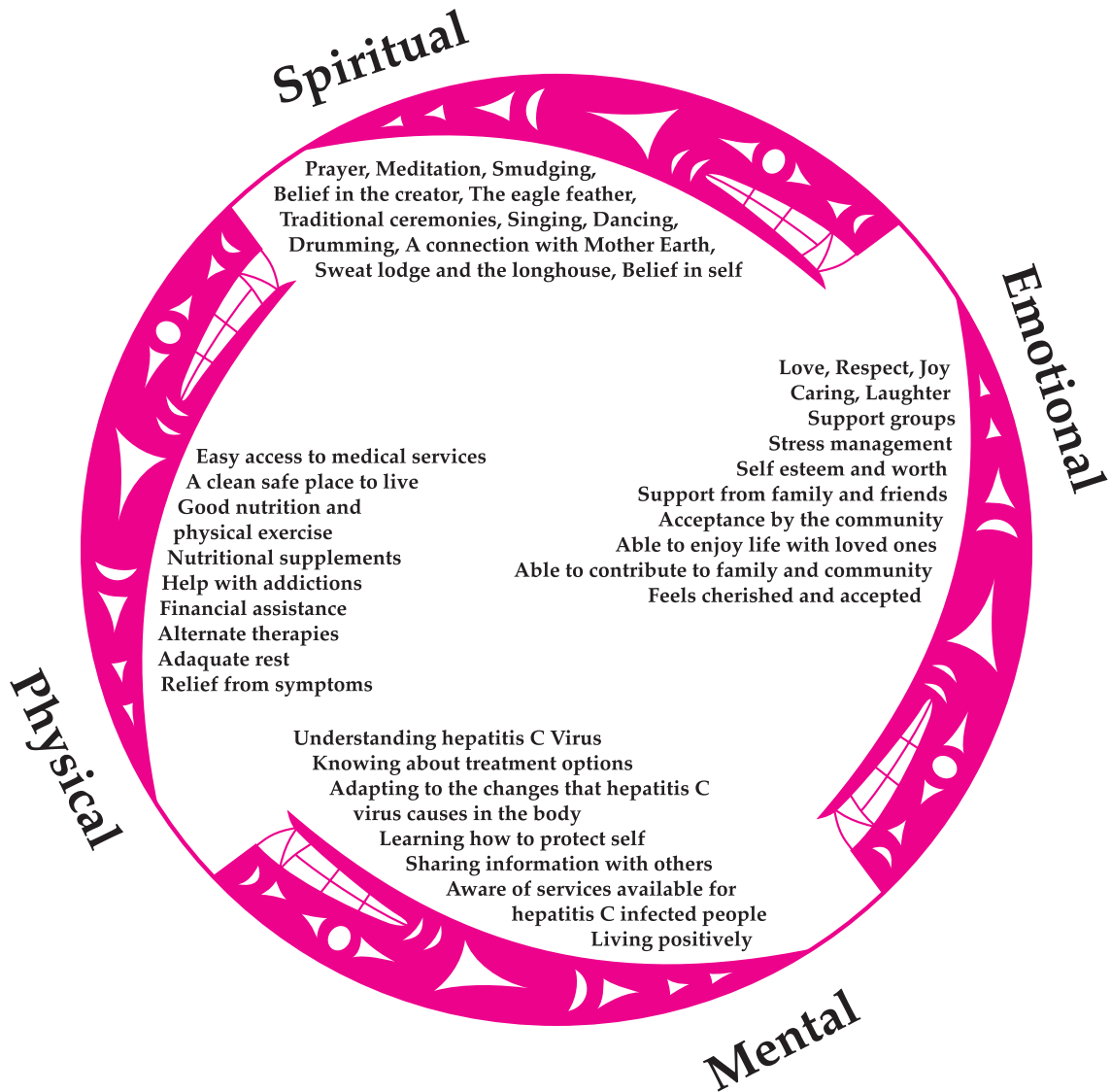
- 1 Dispose of needles properly; use tongs to pick a used needle up and put it in a sharps container; this includes needles used for insulin injection by people with diabetes
- 1 When cleaning up blood spills or spills of other body fluids, wear latex gloves
- 1 When cleaning nail clippers, files or earrings that have been used, wash with soap and water, then soak in alcohol or peroxide for 20 seconds.
- 1 Clean up body fluid spills with household bleach and water (9 parts water and 1 part bleach) or other cleaning agent.
- 1 Dispose of clean-up garbage in sealed plastic bags immediately



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The needs of someone living with hepatitis C are like the needs of the rest of the community



Spirit Bear: Among some First Nation cultures, bear represents strength and agility. The White Spirit Bear of coastal British Columbia, legend says, was created by Raven as a reminder of the last ice age and represents peace and harmony.

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Words to know

Antibodies: part of your body's natural defence to infections

Bacterium: a type of tiny organism that can cause disease

Body Fluids: blood, semen (cum), vaginal secretions, vomit, saliva (spit), tears, urine (pee)

Cancer: a tumor that is malignant, which means it can spread around the body

Cirrhosis: severe, widespread scarring that destroys the liver

Co-infection: being infected with more than one disease at the same time, usually refers to Hepatitis C & HIV

Fibrosis: scar tissue that forms on the liver in reaction to an infection or a toxin (e.g. alcohol)

Genotype: the genetic make-up of a virus

Harm reduction: a program to help people change harmful behaviours to healthier behaviours

Hepatitis: an inflammation or irritation of the liver

Infection: an invasion of body tissues by "germs", like viruses

Inflammation: a reaction of your body to injury or disease characterized by pain, redness, heat and swelling

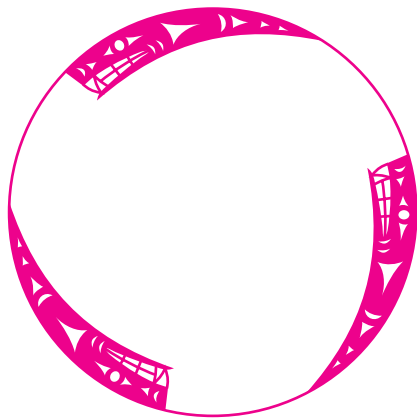
Liver biopsy: removal of a small piece of liver tissue that is examined under a microscope to measure the amount of liver damage you have.

Symptoms: the signs you see or how you feel when your body is infected

Transmission: how a virus or infection is spread from one person to another

Viral load: the amount of virus that is detectable in your blood

Virus: an organism that may cause an infection. It takes over a cell to make more copies of itself.



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