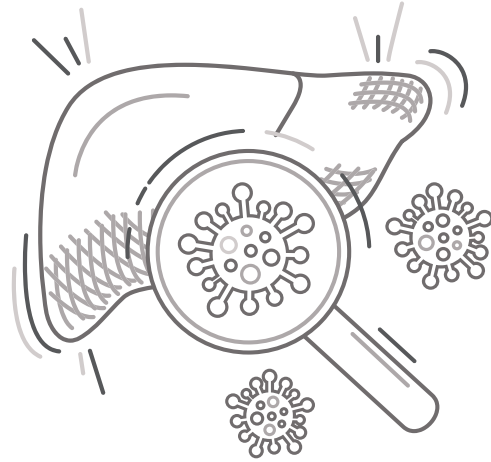


HEPATITIS C BASICS



WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is an infection in the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus. Over time, the virus causes liver injury and scarring and can make you very sick.



Hepatitis A and hepatitis B can also affect the liver. These viruses can be confused with the hepatitis C virus, but they are not the same.

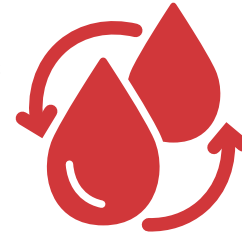
ABOUT THE LIVER

You can't live without your liver. It is a very important organ because it helps the body fight infections, break down toxins like alcohol and drugs, digest food, and more. An injured liver has a harder time doing these important functions.

HOW IS HEPATITIS C TRANSMITTED?

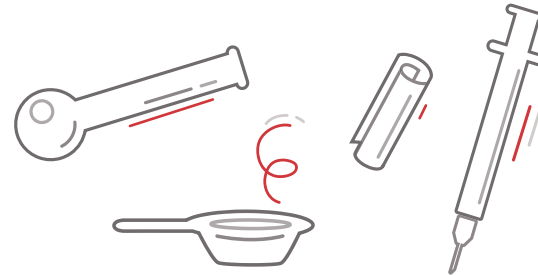
HEPATITIS C IS PASSED BLOOD TO BLOOD

The hepatitis C virus gets into the blood through breaks in the skin or in the lining of the nose and mouth. Hepatitis C is a strong virus: it can survive in a tiny drop of blood that is too small to see and can live outside of the body for many days. In certain conditions, such as inside a syringe, the virus can survive for many weeks. This means dried blood can also pass the virus.



Here are the main ways hepatitis C can be passed:

- Sharing equipment for injecting, smoking or snorting drugs.

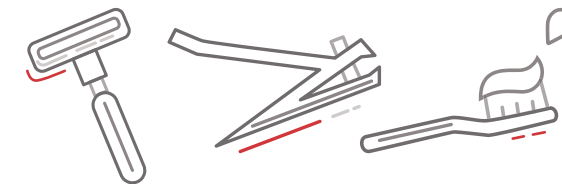


- Re-using tattooing or piercing equipment that was not cleaned properly.

- Re-using medical equipment that was meant to be used only once, such as needles for vaccines or medicines, or medical equipment that was not cleaned properly before re-use. This is very rare in Canada.
- Getting a blood transfusion or organ transplant that was not screened for hepatitis C. In Canada, donated blood has been screened for hepatitis C since 1990. In some other countries, blood was not screened until more recently.

Hepatitis C can also be passed in these ways:

- Sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, razors and nail clippers that may have traces of blood on them can pass hepatitis C.



- Hepatitis C transmission during sex is not common. The risk increases if you have condomless anal sex or group sex, if you use drugs before or during sex, if you have sex where blood might be present, or if you or your partner(s) have HIV or another sexually transmitted infection.

- Hepatitis C can be passed from parent to child during pregnancy or childbirth, but this is also not common.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT HEPATITIS C?

If you inject, smoke or snort drugs:

EVERYTHING NEW EVERY TIME YOU USE



- Use your own new needles, syringes, filters, water and cookers if you inject drugs.
- Use your own pipes or stems and mouthpieces if you smoke drugs.
- Use your own rolled paper or straws if you snort drugs.

Don't use drugs alone.

Carry naloxone, know how to use it and let others know you have it.





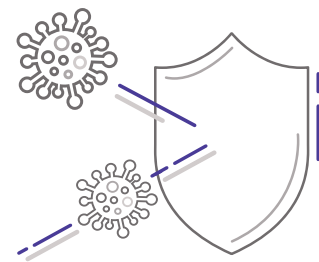
CATIE thanks all the community and clinical reviewers who contributed their expertise to this resource.

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Other ways you can prevent hepatitis C:



- Use sterile equipment, new needles and new ink when getting a tattoo or piercing.
- Do not share your own personal care items that may have traces of blood on them, such as razors, nail clippers and toothbrushes.
- Use condoms and lube during sex that has a higher chance of hepatitis C transmission.
- Get tested to know your hepatitis C status.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HEPATITIS C?

YOU CAN HAVE HEPATITIS C AND NOT KNOW IT

You can have hepatitis C for many years without having symptoms or feeling sick, even though the virus may be injuring your liver.



The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

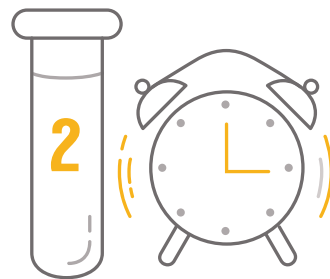
Knowing if you have hepatitis C early and getting cured means there is less time for your liver to become injured by the hepatitis C virus.

It takes two different blood tests to tell if you have hepatitis C:

- The first test is a screening or hepatitis C antibody test. It checks to see if you have ever had hepatitis C.



- The second test is a confirmatory or hepatitis C viral load test. It checks to see if you have hepatitis C right now.



Sometimes both tests are done using blood collected at a single visit and sometimes you will need to return to

provide a new blood sample for the second test. Talk to your nurse or doctor about getting tested for hepatitis C.

CAN HEPATITIS C BE CURED?

TREATMENT CURES OVER 95% OF PEOPLE WITH HEPATITIS C



About one in four people clear hepatitis C on their own, but most people need treatment to cure hepatitis C. If someone doesn't clear the virus after six months, they have a chronic hepatitis C infection.

Remember that the only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

If you have hepatitis C, talk to your nurse or doctor about your treatment options.

- Treatment comes in pill form, has few side effects and is usually taken for eight or 12 weeks.



- For most people, the cost of treatment is covered through public health insurance plans (provincial, territorial or federal). Private insurance plans may also cover the cost of treatment.

Getting cured of hepatitis C has many benefits:

- It can prevent your liver from becoming more injured. Treatment also prevents liver failure and reduces your chances of developing liver cancer or dying.
- It can improve your liver health over time.
- It can improve your quality of life. For example, some people have more energy, better sleep and less body pain after they are cured.

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C infection, and no one is immune to hepatitis C. Even if you have had hepatitis C before, you can get it again if the virus gets into your blood. You will need to be treated again if your body does not clear the virus on its own.