

6 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HEP C

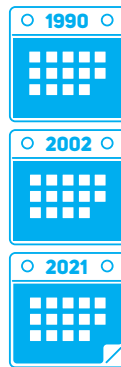


1 HEPATITIS C (HEP C) IS A VIRUS THAT INJURES THE LIVER.

The liver is a very important organ in your body. It helps the body fight infections, break down toxins (poisons) and drugs, digest food, and more. You can't live without it.



YOU CAN HAVE HEP C AND NOT KNOW IT.



You can live with Hep C for 20 to 30 years or more without feeling sick even though the virus is injuring the liver. Over time, the injury to the liver gets worse, making it hard for this organ to work properly.

3 TESTING IS THE ONLY WAY TO FIND OUT IF YOU HAVE HEP C.

It usually takes two blood tests to tell whether you have Hep C. The first test (an antibody test) checks to see if you have ever come in contact with the virus. The second test (a PCR or RNA test) checks to see if you have a Hep C infection right now.






4 HEP C IS PASSED BLOOD TO BLOOD.

The virus gets into the blood through breaks in the skin or in the lining of the nose and mouth. Hep C is a strong virus: it can live outside of the body for many days. This means dried blood can also pass the virus.



The main ways Hep C can get inside the body:

- Re-using drug equipment that was used by someone else. This includes needles, syringes, filters, cookers, acidifiers, alcohol swabs, tourniquets, water, pipes for smoking crack or crystal meth, and straws for snorting. 
- Re-using tools for piercing and tattooing, including needles, ink and ink pots. Also re-using tools for electrolysis or acupuncture. 
- 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. 

- Getting a blood transfusion or organ transplant that was not screened for Hep C. In Canada, donated blood has been screened for Hep C since 1990. In some other countries, blood was not able to be screened until more recently.



Other ways Hep C can get inside the body:

- Sharing or borrowing personal care items that might have blood on them, such as razors, nail clippers and toothbrushes.
- Having anal sex without a condom, especially when blood is present and when one of the partners has HIV or another sexually transmitted infection.



HEPC

TREATMENT CAN CURE HEP C. 5



About one in four people clear Hep C without treatment, but most people need treatment to cure Hep C. Newer treatments now available in Canada are much more effective than older Hep C drugs. They are also easier to take, have fewer side effects and are taken for a shorter time.

6 HEP C IS DIFFERENT FROM HEP A AND HEP B.

Hepatitis A (Hep A) and hepatitis B (Hep B) can also affect the liver. These viruses are easy to confuse with Hep C.

The main differences are:

- Most people clear Hep A and Hep B after a period of sickness, but people can have Hep C for years without knowing it.
- There are vaccines to protect against Hep A and Hep B, but there is no vaccine for Hep C.



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