

Common Questions about Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) Infection

Key Facts

1. Many people with hepatitis C don't have any symptoms.
2. CDC recommends testing for everyone 18+.
3. There is a cure for HCV.
4. To prevent HCV, use a new, sterile needle every time and avoid sharing needles.

What is Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)?

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes a liver infection. It can be acute (a new infection) or chronic (a long-term infection). For some people, acute HCV will be short-term, but many acute infections will become chronic.

About 10-20% of people living with HCV will develop scarring of the liver, called cirrhosis. This can increase the risk of liver cancer. Cirrhosis is the most common reason for a liver transplant in the US.

Fortunately, there is a cure for hepatitis C. Treatments for HCV have significantly improved in the last decade and are more effective, take less time, and have fewer side effects. HCV treatment is recommended for all people currently living with HCV.

What are the symptoms of HCV?

Many people do not develop symptoms. Those who do experience symptoms usually experience them within the first few weeks or months of their infection.

Symptoms can include abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, yellow skin or eyes (jaundice), dark urine, and clay-colored stool.

How does HCV spread from person to person?

HCV is transmitted by blood-to-blood contact. This means that a person becomes infected when the blood (or fluids containing blood) of a person with HCV enters their body.

This can happen in several ways:

- Sharing needles or other drug use equipment like syringes, cotton, and cookers.
- From parent to child during pregnancy or birth.
- Less frequent ways that HCV is spread include sex, sharing personal items like razors or toothbrushes, needlestick injuries, and tattoos or piercings outside of a licensed facility.

How can HCV be prevented?

HCV can be prevented by treating all blood and bodily fluids as if they were infectious:

- Cover broken skin and keep hands and surfaces clean.
- Never share drug use equipment. Use a new and sterile syringe for every injection.

If a sterile needle is not an option, cleaning syringes can help to reduce your risk for HCV infection between each use:

[How To Clean Syringes
\(www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/library/pocket-guides/cdc-hiv-pocket-guide-cleaning-syringes.pdf\)](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/library/pocket-guides/cdc-hiv-pocket-guide-cleaning-syringes.pdf)

Who should be tested for HCV?

The CDC recommends one-time testing for every person 18 and older. Routine testing is recommended for people with ongoing risk factors. Pregnant persons should be tested each pregnancy.

There are two parts to an HCV diagnosis.

1. **Screening test:** This test checks for the presence of HCV antibodies in the blood. This test will be positive for anyone who currently has or has ever had an HCV infection.
2. **Follow up testing:** If the screening test is positive, additional testing must be done to confirm if there is a current infection. This follow-up test checks for the presence of hepatitis C virus in the blood. If the hepatitis C virus is present, then the person has a current HCV infection.

What should a person with HCV limit or avoid?

Individuals with HCV should avoid or limit alcohol consumption. It is important to check with a healthcare provider before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medications or supplements, as some medications can be toxic to the liver.

What is HCV treatment like?

HCV treatment is recommended for all people living with HCV. Treatment typically involves a pill taken once a day for 8–12 weeks. Current treatments cure over 95% of HCV infections and have minimal side effects.

In the past, there was a requirement to maintain sobriety from drugs and alcohol before beginning treatment. Sobriety is **no longer** a requirement for HCV treatment.

Can someone with HCV donate blood, plasma, or organs?

A person who has ever had HCV cannot donate blood or plasma, even if they no longer have HCV. Organ, eye, and tissue donation from people who had or currently have HCV infection is determined on a case-by-case basis.

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