

HEPATITIS C:

WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW



What is hepatitis C (hep C)?

Hepatitis C (hep C) is a serious but curable liver disease caused by the hep C virus.

Most people who get infected with hep C will develop a chronic (or lifelong) infection and need treatment. Without treatment, chronic hep C can cause serious problems including liver disease, liver failure, liver cancer, and death.

With treatment, over 95% of people can be cured of hep C as little in as little as 8 weeks, with few or no side effects.

How is hep C spread?

Hep C is spread from person to person through contact with infected blood.

It can be passed from:

- Sharing needles, syringes, cookers, or other drug use equipment (e.g., glass pipes with cracked edges, straws/bills used for snorting drugs).
- Unregulated tattoos, permanent cosmetics, or body piercings.
- Blood transfusions prior to 1992, when widescreen screening became available in the United States.
- Sexual activities that may cause bleeding with someone who has hep C.
- Sharing personal items (nail clippers, toothbrushes, razors, glucose monitors, etc.).
- Exposure to blood from a person with hep C.
- Transmission from pregnant parent to baby.

Is there a vaccine for hep C?

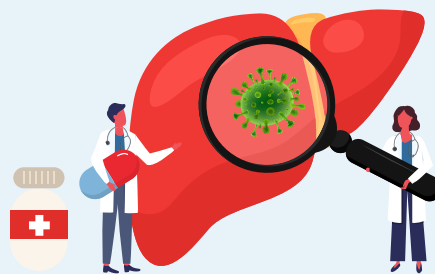
There is no vaccine to prevent hep C.

There are vaccines for hepatitis A & B viruses, which are recommended to prevent other liver infections and complications.

Who should get tested?

Many people who have hep C don't have symptoms. The only way to know if you have hep C is to get tested. Get tested if you:

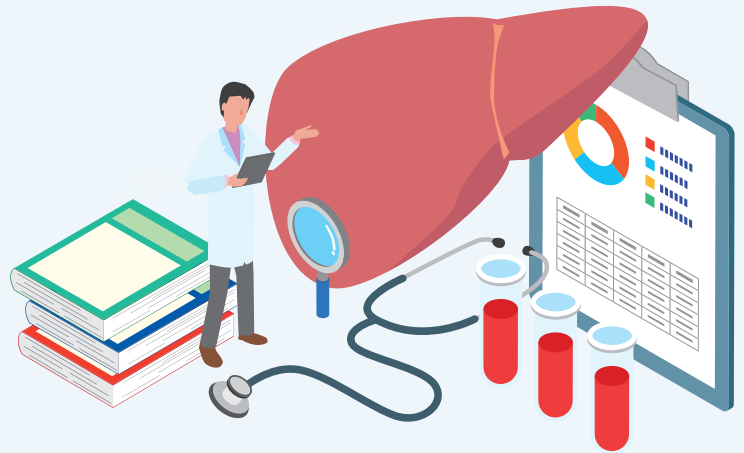
- Are over 18 years of age (get tested at least once in your lifetime).
- Are pregnant (with each pregnancy).
- Currently inject drugs (every 6 months).
- Have ever injected drugs, even once (even if it was a long time ago).
- Have HIV.
- Had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992.
- Have been exposed to blood from a person with hep C.
- Were born to a birthing parent with hep C.



Is hep C curable?

Yes! Treatments are available now and can cure more than 95% of people with 8 to 12 weeks of oral medication and very few side effects.

- People who receive treatment and are cured of hep C are much less likely to develop severe liver scarring or cancer.
- If you are cured of hep C, you can become infected again. If you are reinfected, you will need to be treated again.



Hep C is NOT spread by:

- Breastmilk or breast/chest feeding
- Sharing food or eating utensils.
- Casual contact like hugging, kissing, or holding hands.

Tips to prevent hep C:

- Avoid sharing or reusing equipment to inject drugs, hormones, silicone, or vitamins (including syringes, cookers, and cottons).
- Avoid sharing straws, bills, pipes, or other equipment used to smoke or snort drugs.
- Only get tattoos, permanent makeup or body piercings from professionals licensed by the Department of Licensing (<https://dol.wa.gov>).
- Practice safer sex, including use of new condoms or gloves with each partner.
- Do not use personal items (such as toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers), that may have an infected person's blood on them, even in amounts too small to see.

What should I do if I'm living with hep C?

Talk to your healthcare provider about treatment for hep C! Everyone has the right to get treated and cured, even if you have or are still using drugs.

- Get tested and vaccinated for hepatitis A & hepatitis B.
- Avoid alcohol or cut back on the amount you drink because alcohol is hard on the liver.
- Check with your healthcare provider before taking any new prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, or herbs/supplements, as some can potentially damage the liver.
- Get tested for HIV, because people who have both HIV and hep C are more likely to get severe liver scarring.
- Get tested for hepatitis B virus, because people who have both hepatitis B virus and hep C are more likely to get severe liver scarring.

For more information, visit:

Washington Department of Health
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/hep-c-hub>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv>