

## Protect yourself.

### You can prevent hepatitis C.

- **Don't share needles** for injecting drugs, tattooing, taking steroids, piercing or any other reason.
- **Avoid contact** with other people's blood. Don't share toothbrushes, razors or other personal articles that might contain blood.
- **Stay informed** about hepatitis C, other kinds of hepatitis, and sexually transmitted disease (STD).

### What about sex?

To protect yourself from the small chance you might get hepatitis C from sex:

- Don't have sex.
- Have sex with only one uninfected partner, who only has sex with you.
- Use latex condoms every time you have sex.
- Don't come in contact with someone else's blood, semen or vaginal fluids.

The same steps that protect you from HIV and other STD will help you avoid getting hepatitis C from sex.

## If you have hepatitis C...

### You can protect your health.

- **Get regular health checkups.**
- **Avoid alcohol and other drugs.** They will harm your liver more. If you can't stop using alcohol or other drugs, get help.
- **Get vaccinated** against hepatitis A and B.
- **Join a support group.** Talking to other people with hepatitis C may help.



I get regular checkups to stay healthy with hepatitis C.

## To Learn More

CDC-INFO

1-800-232-4636

American Liver Foundation

1-800-465-4837

Professional models were used in all photos. This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care.

Written by Marcia Quackebush, MS, MFT, MCHES.

Reviewed 2012. Revised 2006. © 1997 ETR Associates.

All rights reserved. It is a violation of U.S. copyright law to reproduce any portion of this publication.

Available in Spanish

1-800-321-4407

[www.etr.org/pub](http://www.etr.org/pub)

A nonprofit organization

**ETR**  
Associates

Title No. HZ71

# Hepatitis C





## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver. It's caused by a virus.

## What are the symptoms?

Most people don't have symptoms at first.

- Those who have symptoms usually feel only slightly ill.
- It can take many years to feel sick from hepatitis C.

### People with symptoms may notice:

- feeling very tired
- fever
- joint pain
- yellow skin or eyes (jaundice)
- no appetite
- dark urine or light-colored stools
- nausea, stomach pain, vomiting

If you have any of these symptoms for more than a few days, see your health care provider. If you have jaundice, see your provider right away.

### People with hepatitis C

Should have regular health checkups.

## Is it serious?

Hepatitis C can turn into a chronic disease.

### About 75–85% of people with hepatitis C develop the chronic form.

- Hepatitis C usually affects someone in a very mild way at first. But it is more likely than any other type of hepatitis to develop into a chronic disease.
- A chronic disease can possibly be treated, but it usually can't be cured.
- People with chronic hepatitis C have the virus in their blood. They can give hepatitis C to other people without knowing it.
- Some people with chronic hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis, or scarring of the liver, or liver cancer. This can take 10, 20 or even 30 years.
- Some people may develop serious illness more quickly.

### You can find out if you have it.

- Your health care provider can give you a blood test. This test will show if infection is present, but not whether it is a chronic infection.
- Further exams by your provider, and additional tests, will help determine if the infection is chronic.

### Ask your health care provider about treatment.

- Medicines are available to treat chronic hepatitis C. Some people may be cured. But the medicines can have serious side effects.
- For someone with very severe, advanced hepatitis C, a liver transplant may be an option.
- People with hepatitis C should have regular health checkups. Providers should always be told if a patient has hepatitis C.
- Common treatments for some illnesses might be harmful to a person with hepatitis C. Providers can choose other treatments in this case.

### People with chronic hepatitis C

should avoid alcohol. Alcohol can speed up the disease process.

## How do you get it?

It's commonly passed from person to person through infected blood.

- The most common way this happens is when people share needles to inject drugs.
- In the past, some people got hepatitis C from blood transfusions. Today, blood for transfusions is screened. The risk of getting hepatitis C from a blood transfusion is almost zero.
- In a few instances, a pregnant woman with hepatitis C has passed the virus to her baby during pregnancy or birth. But this isn't common.
- Hepatitis C can also be passed during sex. But this isn't common.



I asked my doctor to test me for hepatitis C.