



**Louisiana Office of Public Health
Infectious Disease Epidemiology
Section**
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Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus. Infection with hepatitis C causes liver inflammation and can lead to cirrhosis and cancer.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

The symptoms of hepatitis C include fatigue, poor appetite, fever, vomiting and occasionally joint pain, hives, or rash. Urine may become darker in color, and then jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes) may appear. Most individuals (80%) may experience few or no symptoms. Symptoms usually appear one to six months after exposure, but usually within two months.

Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

- Anyone with a blood transfusion before 1990.
- Health care workers.
- IV drug users.
- Hemodialysis patients.
- Infants born to infected mothers.
- Although hepatitis C is not easily transmitted sexually, those with multiple sex partners are at a greater risk.

How is hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread by contact with infected blood through contaminated IV drug needles, razors, tattoo/body piercing, and other sharp instruments. Infected mothers can pass the virus to their newborns.

Hepatitis C is not easily sexually transmitted, however, those with multiple partners are at a greater risk of spreading or getting the infection.

What are the long-term effects of hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C can lead to cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer. More than 85% of people infected will have a chronic infection. Approximately, 70% of infected persons will experience chronic liver disease. Hepatitis C is the leading cause for the need for a liver transplant in the USA today.

What is the treatment for hepatitis C?

HCV positive persons should be evaluated by their doctor for liver disease.

Interferon and ribavirin are two drugs licensed for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C. Interferon can be taken alone or in combination with ribavirin. Combination therapy, using pegylated interferon and ribavirin, is currently the treatment of choice. Combination therapy can get rid of the virus in up to 5 out of 10 persons for genotype 1 and in up to 8 out of 10 persons for genotype 2 and 3.

Drinking alcohol can make your liver disease worse.

Is there a vaccine for hepatitis C?

At the present time there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

How can hepatitis C be prevented?

- Do not shoot drugs; if you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program; if you can't stop, never share needles, syringes, water, or "works"
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- HCV can be spread by sex, but this is rare. If you are having sex with more than one steady sex partner, use latex condoms* correctly and every time to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.
- If you are HCV positive, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.
- If you are a health care or public safety worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps;
- Clean up all blood spills with bleach, wearing protective gloves.