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## Hepatitis C Fact Sheet

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### *What is hepatitis C?*

Hepatitis C is a virus that enters the bloodstream and then infects the liver.

### *How is the virus spread?*

Hepatitis C is most often spread from person to person through contact with infected blood. Sharing drugs, needles, or “works” are common ways that people become infected.

### *How serious is hepatitis C?*

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Many of these persons have some liver damage but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some persons with liver damage due to hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and the liver failure may take many years to develop. Others have no long-term effects.

### *What are the symptoms?*

Most people infected with hepatitis C do not have symptoms for years, even decades, following infection. Symptom onset is slow and may include fatigue, loss of appetite, vague abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting and yellowing of skin or eyes (jaundice).

### *How soon do the symptoms appear?*

It takes anywhere from two to six months after exposure before the symptoms of infection appear.

### *How is hepatitis C diagnosed?*

There are several blood tests that can determine if a person has been infected with hepatitis C virus. The doctor may order just one or a combination of these tests.

### *Who is at risk?*

- Injection drug users
- Hemodialysis patients
- Health care and public safety workers who have blood exposures
- Persons with multiple sex partners
- Recipient of blood transfusions before July, 1992
- Recipients of clotting factors made before 1987
- Infants born to infected mothers

### *What can I do to protect myself from becoming infected with hepatitis C?*

- Do not ever inject drugs. If you inject drugs, stop, and get into a treatment program. If you cannot stop, never reuse or share needles, syringes, water, or drug “works”.
- HCV can be spread by sex, but this does not occur very often. If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner, use latex condoms every time you have sex.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles. They might be contaminated with someone else’s blood.

*What is the treatment for hepatitis C?*

Antiviral medications such as interferon, used alone or in combination with ribavirin, are approved for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C infection. However, these medications do not benefit everyone with hepatitis C.

*Is there a vaccine for hepatitis C?*

Unfortunately, there is not a vaccine available that can protect persons from hepatitis C infection.

*Should someone infected with hepatitis C be excluded from work or school?*

Persons should not be excluded from work, school, play, child-care or other settings based on their hepatitis C infection status.

*If you are infected, what can you do to take care of yourself?*

- Avoid alcoholic beverages and street drugs. They will damage your liver.
- Avoid taking herbal remedies, or prescription or over-the-counter medicines unless your doctor tells you it is ok.
- Eat a healthy diet and get enough rest.
- See a physician regularly.
- Get regular exercise and develop a stress reduction plan.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

*What can you do to protect others?*

- Cover all cuts and sores with a bandage and wash hands well after touching blood or body fluids.
- Throw away any items that have your blood on them, such as bandages and menstrual pads, in plastic bags and close tightly.
- Clean up blood spills with paper towels. Then reclean the area with a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water).
- Do not share chewing gum, toothbrushes, razors, scissors, needles for ear piercing, nail files, or anything else that may come in contact with your blood or body fluids.
- Do not share syringes and needles.
- Do not donate blood, plasma, or body organs.