

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease that ranges in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness that attacks the liver. It results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is spread primarily through contact with the blood of an infected person. Hepatitis C can be either “acute” or “chronic.”

How is Hepatitis C Spread?

Hepatitis C can be spread in any one of the following ways:

- Blood to blood contact
- Exposure to contaminated needles, syringes, or other equipment. This may occur in healthcare settings or with recreational drug use.
- Sex with multiple partners or rough sex
- Delivery of a baby to a mother with hepatitis C
- Tattooed or pierced with non-sterile needles or equipment
- Accidental needle stick with a needle that was used on an infected person
- Using the same razor or toothbrush that an infected person used
- **Hepatitis C virus is not spread by sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing.**

Is there a vaccine that can prevent Hepatitis C?

Not yet. Vaccines are available only for Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B.

What are the symptoms of acute Hepatitis C?

Approximately 70%–80% of people with acute Hepatitis C do not have any symptoms. Some people, however, can have mild to severe symptoms soon after being infected, including

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellow color in the skin or eyes)

How soon after exposure to Hepatitis C do symptoms appear?

If symptoms occur, the average time is 6–7 weeks after exposure, but this can range from 2 weeks to 6 months. However, many people infected with the Hepatitis C virus do not develop symptoms. The truth is that some people will never be able to be sure how they were infected.

How do I find out if I have Hepatitis C?

You can find out if you have Hepatitis C by taking an antibody test. If this comes back positive, it means that you have been exposed to the virus at some time. If it is negative, then you may be required to have another test at a later time, depending on your date of possible exposure. If the antibody test is positive, then a further test to check for the active virus will be necessary.

What can a person with chronic Hepatitis C do to take care of his or her liver?

People with chronic Hepatitis C should be monitored regularly by an experienced doctor. They should avoid alcohol because it can cause additional liver damage. They also should check with a health professional before taking any prescription pills, supplements, or over-the-counter medications, as these can potentially damage the liver. If liver damage is present, a person should check with his or her doctor about getting vaccinated against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B.

Should a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus be restricted from working in certain jobs or settings?

CDC's recommendations for prevention and control of the Hepatitis C virus infection state that people should not be excluded from work, school, play, child care, or other settings because they have Hepatitis C. There is no evidence that people can get Hepatitis C from food handlers, teachers, or other service providers without blood-to-blood contact.

How is Hepatitis C treated?

Antiviral medication can be used to treat some people with chronic hepatitis C, although not everyone needs or can benefit from treatment. For many, treatment can be successful and results in the virus no longer being detected.

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that ranges in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness. It results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B can be either “acute” or “chronic.”

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluid infected with the Hepatitis B virus enters the body of a person who is not infected. People can become infected with the virus during activities such as:

- Birth (spread from an infected mother to her baby during birth)
- Sex with an infected partner
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes with an infected person
- Direct contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person
- Exposure to blood from needlesticks or other sharp instruments
- **Hepatitis B virus is not spread by sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing.**

What are the symptoms of acute Hepatitis B?

Symptoms of acute Hepatitis B, if they appear, can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellow color in the skin or the eyes)

How soon after exposure to Hepatitis B will symptoms appear?

Not everyone has symptoms with acute hepatitis B. On average, symptoms appear 90 days (or 3 months) after exposure, but they can appear any time between 6 weeks and 6 months after exposure.



Is there a vaccine that can prevent Hepatitis B?

Yes. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the hepatitis B vaccine is given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection.

Are booster doses of Hepatitis B vaccine necessary?

It depends. A “booster” dose of Hepatitis B vaccine is a dose that increases or extends the effectiveness of the vaccine. **Booster doses are recommended only for hemodialysis patients and can be considered for other people with a weakened immune system.** Booster doses are not recommended for persons with normal immune status who have been fully vaccinated.

Should a person infected with the Hepatitis B virus be restricted from working in certain jobs or settings?

People should not be excluded from work, school, play, child care, or other settings because they have Hepatitis B. There is no evidence that people can get Hepatitis B from food handlers, teachers, or other service providers without exposure to infected body fluids.

How is Hepatitis B treated?

Antiviral medication can be used to treat some people with chronic Hepatitis B, although not everyone needs or can benefit from treatment.