



NL Health Services

Infection Prevention and Control

FACT SHEET

Hepatitis C



What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (Hep C) is a disease of the liver caused by the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV). This virus is contagious and is found in the blood of an infected individual. Hep C changes occur slowly; it can be managed and, in many cases, treated successfully if found early.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C Disease?

- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).
- Fatigue, loss of appetite, lethargy.
- Light colored stool.
- Sore muscles and joints, abdominal pain, and nausea.
- Most infected individuals will not have any symptoms, but they can still transmit the virus, which is why it is important to take precautions.

Who can get Hepatitis C?

- You can get Hep C from blood-to-blood contact with an infected individual.
- You **cannot** get Hep C from day-to-day contact with an HCV infected individual.
- Infants being born to Hep C positive mothers are at risk of having HCV.
- Healthcare workers are at risk from needle-stick injuries.
- Individuals who share razors or drug supplies that may be contaminated with blood.

How is Hepatitis C spread?

- Hep C is found in the blood of infected individuals and is spread through contact with infected blood.
- Hep C is spread through blood-to-blood contact.
- Hep C is **NOT** found in food or water.
- Although Hep C is not a sexually transmitted infection, transmission may occur during unprotected sex if there is blood-to-blood contact.
- Hep C is **NOT** spread through close contact such as hugging, kissing, shaking hands, coughing, or sneezing.

How to prevent Hepatitis C?

- If pregnant, you should know your Hep C status.
- Do not share needles or other drug supplies.
- Do not share personal items such as razors, nail clippers, or toothbrushes.
- Practice safe sex.
- Take appropriate precautions when in contact with blood – wear gloves and clean your hands.



- Do not donate blood, organs, or semen if you are positive for HCV.

How is Hepatitis C Managed?

- There is no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C.
- Currently treatment is a combination of antiviral medications aimed at decreasing the “viral load” or the amount of virus in the blood.
- Natural remedies have been on the rise but should only be taken after consultation with your physician. These may interact with conventional medications and decrease or change the effectiveness of the drug.
- Liver transplants are not considered until an individual experience's liver failure. The success rate is 80%; however, infection of the liver with Hep C will reoccur.

Types of Hepatitis C

Acute:

Approximately 25% of cases will have a mild, brief disease and get rid of the virus completely. The antibodies usually are detectable in the blood, but the actual viral material is not.

Chronic:

Approximately 75% of cases will have a chronic infection that will not disappear. These individuals will have HCV infection for the rest of their lives.