

UPDATED

Frequently Asked Questions about Hepatitis C



Hepatitis Education
Canada

What is hepatitis C?



Liver

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes damage to the liver. The liver does over 500 jobs for the body.

There is **no vaccine** for hepatitis C.

How is hepatitis C spread?



The hepatitis C virus is spread when the **blood** of a person with hepatitis C gets into another person's **bloodstream***, such as through an opening in the skin.

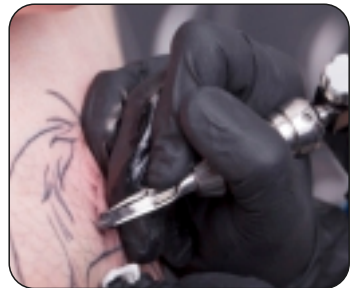
* Sometimes called **blood-to-blood** contact.

Hepatitis C is easily spread by:



- sharing injection equipment or other works (e.g., needles syringes, water, spoons)

- sharing unsterilized piercing or tattooing equipment* or tattoo ink*



Tattoo image: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/tattoo-process-explained-step-by-step.html>

*The risk of spreading hepatitis C is higher with home or prison tattooing

Hepatitis C can sometimes be spread by:

- ◆ sharing drug snorting equipment



- ◆ unprotected* sex, **when there is blood**, including sex between:
 - ◆ men and women
 - ◆ men and men
 - ◆ or during sexual assault (for both victim and offender)

*The risk of passing hep C through sex is higher when there is a co-infection with HIV, HBV or other sexually passed infections that cause sores or cuts.

Hepatitis C is less often spread by:

🔴 sharing personal items that might have small amounts of blood on them, like:

🔴 toothbrushes

🔴 dental floss

🔴 razors, or

🔴 nail clippers

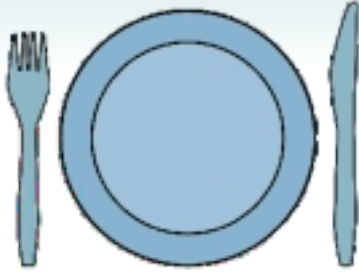


🔴 accidentally being poked with a used needle



🔴 a mother passing it to her infant during childbirth

Hepatitis C is not spread through:



- water
- food
- sharing dishes

...or through day-to-day activities like:

- hugging or kissing
- sharing clothes



- coughing, sneezing
- using public toilets or swimming

Are there symptoms from hepatitis C?



At first, most people will have no or only a few symptoms, but...

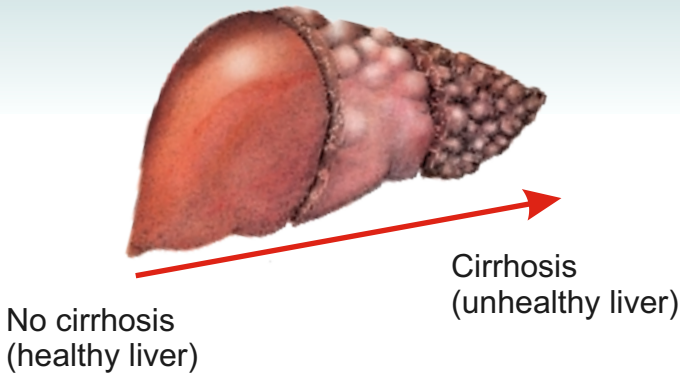
... over time some develop symptoms such as

- feeling tired
- muscle pain
- joint pain
- headaches
- itchy skin



- pain in stomach area
- depression
- anxiety
- “brain fog”
- nausea

Is hepatitis C a death sentence?



No! Most people who get hepatitis C do not die from it. But, over a long period of time, some will develop:

- cirrhosis (the liver shrinks, hardens and does not work properly)
- liver cancer
- or may need a liver transplant

Do people with hepatitis C need to see a provider even if they feel fine?



Yes! Every 6-12 months the liver should be checked for damage. Even if a person feels well and has no symptoms, hepatitis C can still be damaging their liver.

What does a hepatitis C viral load (HCV RNA*) test check?

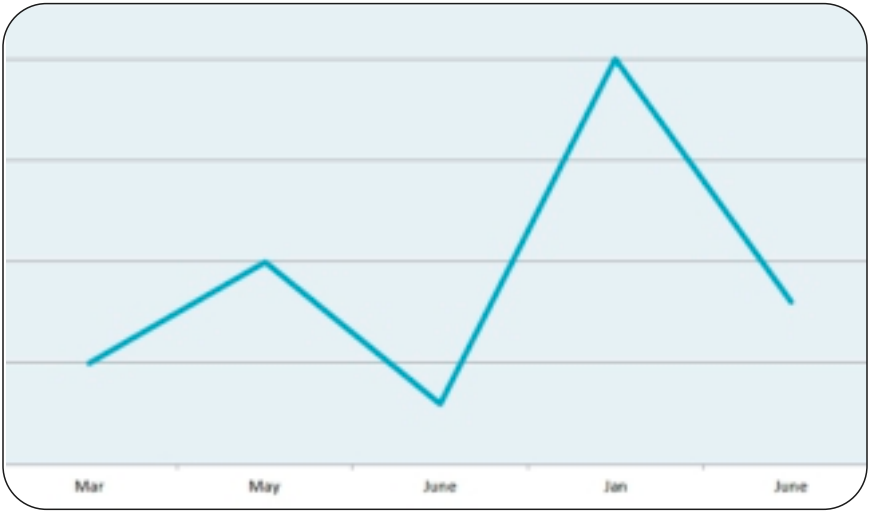


It checks if the virus is in a person's blood. It can tell if:

- a person currently has hepatitis C (an HCV antibody test alone does not tell if a person currently has hepatitis C)
- treatment is working

*Some RNA tests only check if the HCV virus is in the blood; others check for how much virus is in the blood.

Do 'normal' ALT levels mean a normal liver, or no liver damage?



Yes and no. It is common for ALT levels to go up and down. Sometimes normal levels occur when the liver is damaged.

Since it is possible to have liver damage even if ALT levels are normal...



... health care providers will recommend a FibroScan[®], blood test, or a liver biopsy to check for liver damage and cirrhosis.

Can hepatitis C be cured?



Yes! New treatments cure about 90% of those who complete treatment. They are:

- all-oral (no injections)
- as short as 8 weeks

Talk to your provider about what is best for your situation.

Can people who are taking alcohol or other drugs get treatment?



Yes! Talk to your provider about finding the best treatment plan for you.

Are there side-effects from hepatitis C antiviral treatment?

Side-effects with new treatments may include:

- headaches
- tiredness
- weakness



Talk with your health care provider about how to manage treatment side-effects.



Hepatitis C **symptoms** and treatment **side-effects** can be different for each person.

Some people may need support from health care providers, family, friends, or peers.

Notes

This resource was created by Hepatitis Education Canada. It would not have been possible without the valuable contributions from individuals affected by hepatitis C and service providers across Canada, support from the University of British Columbia and the BC Centre for Disease Control, and funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada*.

For more information
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**Hepatitis Education
Canada**

* The views expressed in this booklet do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

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