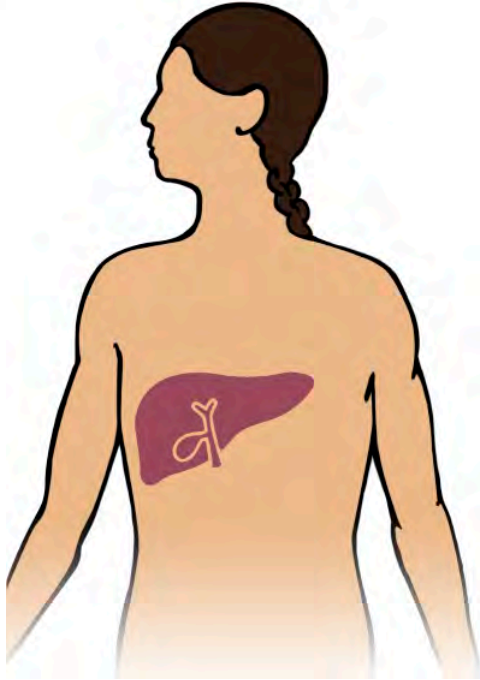


UPDATED

Frequently Asked Questions about Hepatitis C



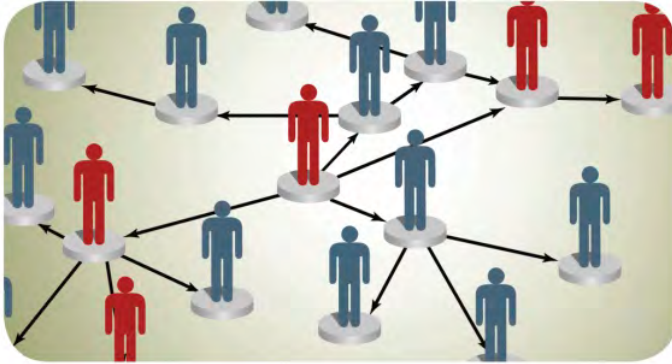
What is hepatitis C?



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 passed?



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 passed by:



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

🔴 sharing unsterilized piercing or tattooing equipment*



🔴 sharing tattoo ink*

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

Hepatitis C can sometimes be passed by:

- ◆ sharing drug snorting equipment



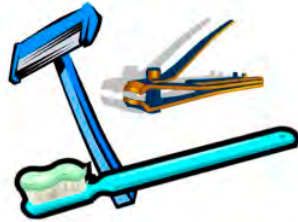
- ◆ unprotected* sex, **when there is blood**, including sex between:
 - ◆ men and women
 - ◆ men and men
 - ◆ or during sexual assault (for both victim and offender)

*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 passed 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 passed through



- water
- food
- sharing dishes

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

- hugging or kissing
- sharing clothes
- coughing, sneezing
- using public toilets or swimming pools
- ceremonies (e.g., talking circles, sweats)



Top image source: Canada's food guide

Are there symptoms from hepatitis C?



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

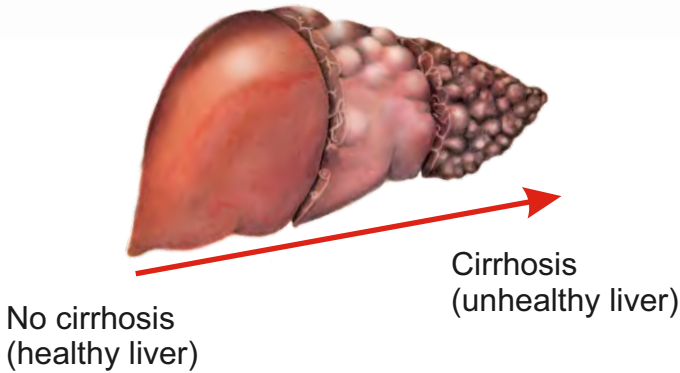
... over time some develop symptoms such as

- 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.

Photo of Dr. Janet Smylie (left) sitting with elder Jan Kahehti:io Longboat (center) and filmmaker Rebeka Tabobondung (right) taken by Michael Dan.

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

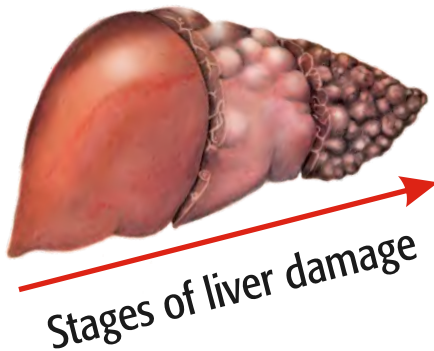


It checks if the virus is in a person's blood. It can tell if:

- 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.

Are there tests for liver damage?



Yes. Your health care provider may do a physical exam and recommend tests to check for liver damage (e.g., a blood test, a FibroScan[®]).

Can hepatitis C be cured?



Yes! Some treatments are as short as 8 weeks.

New pill medications can cure about 9 out of 10 people who complete treatment.

But, being cured does **not** protect a person from getting hepatitis C again.

Can people with hepatitis C and other health issues get hepatitis C treatment?



HIV



Diabetes



Mental Health

Yes! But, it is important to discuss all health issues with a health care provider when planning treatment.

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



Yes! They should ask to be referred to a provider who has experience with hepatitis C treatment for people who take drugs (e.g., injection drugs, alcohol, methadone).



These experienced providers may include:

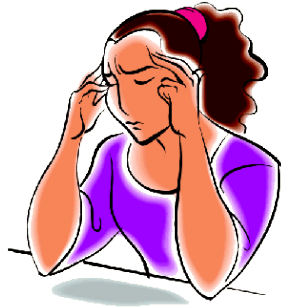
- health care providers
- social care providers
- community members, or
- volunteers

These providers can help fit treatment into a person's life.

Are there side-effects from hepatitis C 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 emotional, mental, spiritual, or physical support. This support could come from health care and other providers, family, friends, elders and peers.

Photo courtesy of Yúusnewas YouthCO Aboriginal Program

This resource was created by Hepatitis Education Canada (formerly the Attendance for Hepatitis C Care Project). It would not have been possible without the valuable contributions from individuals affected by hepatitis C, service providers and representatives from First Nations, Métis and Inuit organizations across Canada.

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For more information

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**Hepatitis Education
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