

A Brief Overview of Hepatitis C

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WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

- Hepatitis C is a virus found in a person's blood that can attack and destroy the liver. While this damage can lead to liver-failure and death, most people infected with the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) don't experience advanced liver disease.
- Most people with HCV have no symptoms and don't know that they have the virus. Symptoms and physical signs of HCV infection rarely appear until about twelve or up to thirty years after being infected.

WHO MAY BE INFECTED?

- Infection is possible for any of the following:
 - Anyone who has had a blood transfusion before 1992
 - People who have frequent exposure to blood-products such as treatment for hemophilia or a solid-organ transplant
 - People who are or have been on Hemodialysis
 - People who have tattoos or had their body pierced
 - Healthcare workers who suffer inadvertent needle-sticks or are otherwise exposed to an infected patient's blood
 - Anyone who has ever used illegal, intravenous (IV) drugs (even if it was only once or many years ago)
 - People who use cocaine using shared equipment, particularly with intranasal administration (snorting)

WHAT ARE COMMON SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS C?

Note: The following can also be symptoms of other diseases or health-issues; most people infected with HCV do not have any symptoms.

- Fatigue
- Depression
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal discomfort
- Lower libido
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle pain
- Jaundice
- Itching
- Mood changes
- Rash
- Heat intolerance
- Poor low-light vision

IS HEPATITIS C CONTAGIOUS?

- HCV is transmitted by direct blood-to-blood contact such as open wounds or shared, contaminated needles (tattoos, illegal IV-drugs)
- HCV doesn't appear to be spread by sexual contact in monogamous relationships
- Care should be taken to avoid blood-exposure to others by not sharing toothbrushes, razors, needles, snorting tubes, nail-clippers, or the like
- HCV-positive individuals should inform dental and medical providers and shouldn't donate blood

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

- If you think you or someone you know may be at-risk, talk to your healthcare provider and get tested. The earlier you find out whether you have HCV, the more likely it is that treatment will be successful.

FACTS

- Each year approximately 170,000 new cases of Hepatitis C occur in the United States
- By the year 2010 there will be more people infected with Hepatitis C than HIV/AIDS
- 50-80% of people infected with Hepatitis C will develop chronic Hepatitis, and 20-30% of those will progress to cirrhosis (severe liver damage)
- On average, 26 Americans die each day from complications related to Hepatitis C