

HEPATITIS C

The Facts



Your liver keeps you healthy in many ways, such as by removing toxins from your blood and transforming nutrients from food into energy.



Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. There are different types of hepatitis. **Hepatitis C** (Hep C for short) is caused by a virus that infects the liver. The virus is transmitted through blood.

Hep C Can Lead to Serious Health Problems:

- Liver damage
- Cirrhosis
- Liver failure
- Liver cancer

Hep C can even cause death.



Symptoms

Many people with Hep C **do not** have symptoms and do not know they are infected.

Symptoms of Hep C can take up to 30 years to develop. When symptoms do appear, they are often a sign of advanced liver disease.

Symptoms and signs of Hep C can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, grey-colored stools, joint pain, jaundice and more.

If you have Hep C, you're not alone.

Nearly **4 million** people in the United States have Hep C. Almost **150,000** people living in New York City have Hep C.

By learning more about Hep C, you can make the best decisions for your health.

Different Stages of Hep C

Acute Hep C refers to the first six months after infection.

- A small percentage of people who get infected clear Hep C on their own within six months.
- Most people do not have symptoms of Hep C in the acute stage.

Chronic Hep C refers to a long-term Hep C infection.

- Most people who get infected with Hep C will develop chronic infection.
- Chronic Hep C can cause inflammation of the liver, which can lead to scarring of the liver tissue, moderate liver damage (fibrosis) and severe liver damage (cirrhosis).
- People with cirrhosis are at high risk for liver failure, liver cancer and even death.
- Liver damage often happens slowly, over 20 to 30 years.



Healthy Liver



Scars



Fibrosis



Cirrhosis



Liver Cancer

Get Care with a Medical Provider Who Knows about Hep C

See your medical provider regularly to make sure you're staying healthy.

Even if you feel great, your liver may have problems.

Your medical provider will help you make the best decisions to improve your health and protect your liver.

Your medical provider may perform some of these tests to confirm that you have Hep C or to find out how Hep C is affecting your health:

- **Hep C Antibody Test:** A blood test that shows if you were ever infected with the Hep C virus. If this test is positive, you'll need to take another test (the Hep C RNA Test) to see if you have Hep C now.
- **Hep C RNA (Viral Load) Test** (also called PCR): A blood test that shows how much Hep C virus is in your blood now. If this test is positive, it means you are currently infected with Hep C.

If you go on Hep C treatment, your Hep C RNA will be checked during and after treatment to find out if the treatment is working. If the treatment is successful, the viral load will drop to zero (undetectable) and stay there.



- **Hep C Genotype Test:** A blood test that shows what type of Hep C virus you have. Knowing your genotype helps your medical provider pick the best treatment for you.
- **Liver Function Tests (LFTs):** Tests that measure how well the liver is working. High levels may mean you have liver inflammation or damage.

Other Liver Health Tests: There are many tests that look for the amount of damage in your liver. One or more of these tests may be recommended:

- **Fibrosure or Fibrotest:** Blood tests that look for liver damage.
- **Liver Ultrasound, Sonogram or Fibroscan:** Non-invasive tests that provide a picture of the shape, size or stiffness of the liver.
- **Liver Biopsy:** Removal of a small piece of liver tissue with a needle to look at under a microscope to see the amount of damage or disease.
- **Liver Cancer Screening Tests:** Tests that check for cancerous cells in the liver. Recommended for people with Hep C or cirrhosis every six months.

Consider Hep C Treatment

Most people with Hep C can be **cured** by taking antiviral medication for several months. Being cured means that no virus is found in the blood a few months after finishing treatment.

Thanks to **new Hep C antiviral medication**, treatment is now easier, shorter and more likely to cure Hep C than in the past.

There is No Hep C Vaccine or Immunity.

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine or immunity against Hep C. Even if you are treated and cured, you can always get re-infected, so it is important to protect yourself from blood exposure.

If You Have Hep C, Protect Your Health

Do not drink alcohol. Alcohol increases the speed of liver damage. Avoiding alcohol is one of the most important things you can do to protect your liver.

If you need help cutting down on alcohol, speak with your medical provider or call **1-800-LIFENET** for counseling or a referral for treatment.

Ask your medical provider before taking over-the-counter medications, natural medications, vitamins or supplements.

Some over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), vitamins, supplements such as iron, or “natural drugs” can be dangerous for your liver. There is no ‘natural medication’ that is known to be effective for treating Hep C. Tell all of your medical care providers that you have Hep C so they can help you avoid medications that may harm your liver.

Eat a healthy diet, exercise and maintain a healthy body weight.

Get support. Share your feelings with your doctor and people you trust.

Consider connecting with a Hep C Support Group in person or online. Visit nychepbc.org for more information.

If you need help managing your feelings, speak with your medical provider or call 1-800-LIFENET for counseling or a referral.



Avoid Spreading Hep C

Never share any drug use equipment or ‘works’ such as needles, syringes, cotton, cups, ties, razors, cutters, rinse water, cookers, straws or pipes.

Do not share personal care items such as toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files, nail clippers, nail scissors or washcloths that may have touched your blood.

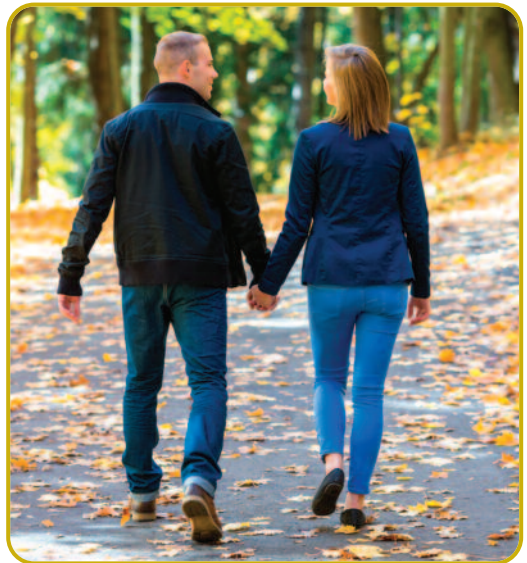
Cover cuts and open sores with bandages, and make sure others do not touch your blood.

Have Safe Sex. If you have multiple sexual partners or if you have HIV or a sexually transmitted infection (STI), use condoms every time.

If you’re pregnant, talk about Hep C with your medical provider. Hep C can be transmitted from mother to baby during pregnancy or childbirth.

Casual Contact Is Safe

You **cannot** spread Hep C through sneezing, coughing, kissing, hugging, shaking hands or talking, or by sharing eating utensils, drinking glasses, food or drinking water. You should not be excluded from work, school, play or childcare if you have Hep C.



Information & Resources

New York City Department of Health

Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health/hepatitis

Low Cost Hep C Medical Care at New York City Public Hospitals

nyc.gov/hhc

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

cdc.gov/hepatitis

American Liver Foundation

Hep C help-line, medical provider locator and online support group

1-800-465-4837 or liverfoundation.org

HCV Advocate

Patient Support and Education

hcvadvocate.org

Harm Reduction Resources

harmreduction.org

LifeNet

24-hour mental health and substance use hotline and referral database

English: 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638)

Spanish/Español: 1-877-AYUDESE (1-877-298-3373)

Asian languages: 1-877-990-8585

Find Health Insurance

a858-ihss.nyc.gov

Hep C Risk Assessment

- Were** you born between 1945 and 1965?
- Have** you ever injected drugs, hormones, steroids, silicone or cosmetics - even if it was once a long time ago?
- Did** you have a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992?
- Are** you HIV+?
- Were** you born in Egypt, Pakistan, Russia or the former Soviet Republic?
- Did** you have a blood transfusion or medical procedure in Egypt, Pakistan, Russia or the former Soviet Republic?
- Have** you ever inhaled (snorted) drugs?
- Did** your mother have hepatitis C when you were born?
- Have** you ever gotten a tattoo or piercing from anyone other than a licensed professional?
- Have** you had abnormal liver tests or been told you have liver disease?
- Have** you ever been on long-term dialysis?
- Were** you ever exposed to blood or stuck with a needle on the job?
- Have** you ever been incarcerated?

Get **Tested**, Get **Cured!**

If You Have Hep C, Ask Your Medical Provider:

- Is** my liver healthy? Do I have liver damage?
- Can** I take vaccines for other diseases such as Hep A, Hep B or the flu to protect my health?
- Is** it safe for me to take my medicines (including over-the-counter medicines), vitamins and supplements?
- What** is the best weight, diet and exercise routine for me?
- What** is the best care for my Hep C?
- Should** I take antiviral treatment?

Call 311 to order this publication

Get Tested, Get Cured!

For more info, visit nyc.gov/health/hepatitis.



Scan to view the NYC Health Department
Hepatitis homepage or text **LIVER** to 877-877
for your next steps.