
▶ **What is hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a chronic liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. There is currently no vaccine against hepatitis C.

▶ **How is hepatitis C spread?**

The hepatitis C virus is carried in the blood, and you can become infected with hepatitis C if you come into contact with the blood of an infected person.

Most common risk factors

- Sharing used needles, syringes, or other drug related equipment (such as cookers, cotton, pipes, straws, bills- even if only shared once or briefly).
- Body piercing, tattooing, acupuncture or electrolysis using unsterile equipment or unsafe techniques.
- Needle-stick or sharps injuries with infected blood on it.
- Receiving a blood transfusion or blood products before 1992 in Canada.
- Sharing razors, toothbrushes, tweezers, manicure or pedicure equipment (such as nail clippers)
- Unprotected sexual activity with an infected person that includes contact with blood or exchange of blood.
- Being born by a mother who has HCV

Hep C is NOT spread through everyday contact such as kissing, coughing or sharing eating utensils or toilets.

▶ **How can I tell if I have hepatitis C?**

Many people do not experience any symptoms when they first become infected. Symptoms, when present, may include one or more of the following:

- fever,
- feeling tired,
- loss of appetite,
- nausea, vomiting,
- abdominal pain,
- joint pain
- jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes).

▶ **Is there a test for hepatitis C?**

It takes two blood tests to know if you have hepatitis C- one to see if you have been exposed to the virus (antibody test) and one to check for active infection (viral load test). It may take several months after being infected for the blood test to be accurate. Within six months of becoming infected, up to 25 per cent of infected individuals will clear the virus on their own. The rest will develop chronic long-term infection and are at high risk for developing liver disease.

▶ **How is hepatitis C treated?**

Treatment may be an option and is usually offered to people with moderate to severe liver damage. The goal of hepatitis C treatment is to get rid of (clear) the virus from your body. Treatments are improving and many people have been cured. Tests done during and after treatment can tell if the virus is gone from your body.

▶ **Is follow-up necessary?**

After successful treatment, it is important to live well and avoid re-infection as you can get hepatitis C again, if you are in contact with the virus again.

▶ **How do I protect myself and others?**

- Do not share needles or drug equipment.
- Never allow anyone to use unsterile equipment on you.
- If you are getting a tattoo, piercing, acupuncture or electrolysis, make sure that:
 - The provider is regulated or inspected
 - The needle being used is single-use, disposable type and never previously used.
 - All other equipment is sterile
- Do not share personal items such as toothbrushes, tweezers, razors, manicure/pedicure equipment or sex toys.
- Wear protective equipment (latex gloves) if you are likely to be in contact with someone else's blood.
- Although sexual transmission is uncommon, abstaining, reducing the number of partners and always using barriers (condoms/dental dams) can reduce the risk.
- Get a sexually transmitted infection (STI) check-up—especially if you've had a new sex partner, more than one sex partner, or suspect you have an infection.
- Ask your partner(s) to be tested before having sex.

▶ **If I already have hepatitis C, what do I need to know?**

Prevention of transmission to others includes the following:

- Not donating blood, semen, , body organs or tissues

- Not sharing toothbrushes, razors, earrings or manicure/pedicure equipment, needles/syringes and other drug-using equipment (i.e.: water, pipes/mouthpieces, filters, cookers/spoons, alcohol swabs, acidifiers (Vitamin C), snorting equipment etc...)
- Keeping all open cuts and sores covered until healed
- Putting articles with blood on them (i.e.: tampons, pads, tissue, dental floss and bandages) in a separate plastic bag before disposing of them into household garbage
- Disposing of sharp items (razor blades, needles etc..) in a sharps container or glass jar or hard-sided container with a tight-fitting and puncture-proof lid
- Using bleach to clean blood spills. Surfaces should be soaked with 1 part bleach to 9 parts water and left for 10 minutes before wiping off
- Informing health care providers (including dental care providers) of disease status where blood exposure is possible.

▶ **References**

[Canadian Guidelines for Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)

For more information about hepatitis C, please see the following links:

Hepatitis C- Basic Facts

http://orders.catie.ca/product_info.php?products_id=25198

Hepatitis C- Newly Diagnosed

http://orders.catie.ca/product_info.php?products_id=25208

Hepatitis C- Treatment Options

http://orders.catie.ca/product_info.php?products_id=25218

Public Health Agency of Canada

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hepc/index-eng.php>

▶ **Who can I talk to if I have more questions?**

If you have concerns or questions, call and ask for Sexual Health, or visit the health unit website below.



**simcoe
muskoka**
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

Tel: 705-721-7520
Toll free: 1-877-721-7520
www.simcoemuskokahealth.org

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Updated August 2015