

HEPATITIS C

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis C is caused by a virus, just like a cold and the flu, but Hepatitis C (HCV) is much more dangerous and difficult to treat.

What makes Hepatitis so dangerous?

Over time, HCV slowly damages the liver. When you have hepatitis, the liver becomes inflamed and scarred. Chronic Hepatitis C can cause chronic liver problems such as cirrhosis and cancer which may develop in 10-30 years.

Many people do not know how they were exposed to HCV.

How do you get Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is spread through exposure from an infected person's blood. Hepatitis is spread by

- Using an infected needle (IV drug needles, tattoos, acupuncture needles, and body piercing).
- Sharing personal items such as razors
- You had a blood transfusion several years ago (blood is now screened for HCV)
- You had unprotected sex with a person who has it (not a common cause)

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C?

Most people have no symptoms until they develop liver disease years later.

Symptoms may include the following:

- Flulike problems (fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and sore muscles)
- Tenderness in the upper right abdomen
- Jaundice (yellowish skin), swelling of the abdomen, itching and dark urine

How is Hepatitis C detected?

Hepatitis C is found through a blood test. Sometimes a liver biopsy is done.

How is Hepatitis C treated?

Hepatitis is difficult to treat. Testing would need to be done in a liver clinic to see if treatment would be advised. Do not stress the liver by using alcohol or drugs such as Tylenol.

How can you prevent the spread of Hepatitis C?

There is no vaccine or medicine to prevent Hepatitis C.

- Cover all skin breaks and sores. Persons helping you should wear latex gloves
- Use condoms during sex
- Do not donate blood or plasma, body organs or sperm
- Do not share needles
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, manicure tools or other personal items