

## Hepatitis C Fact Sheet

### What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by a virus. It can cause jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and eyes), fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, and dark urine. **80% of those infected will have no symptoms.**

### How is Hepatitis C spread?

- When blood or body fluids from an infected person enter the body of a person who is not infected.
- Most infections are due to illegal injection drug use. Hepatitis C is spread through sharing needles or "works" when "shooting" drugs
- Through needle sticks or sharps injury on the job
- From an infected mother to her baby during birth.

### How can a person prevent this illness?

- **There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.**
- Do not shoot drugs; if you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program; if you can't stop, never share needles, syringes, water, or "works", and get vaccinated against hepatitis A & B.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- If you are a health care or public safety worker, always follow routine precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps; get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the facility staff does not follow good health practices.
- HCV can be spread by sex, but this is rare. If you are having sex with more than one steady sex partner, use latex condoms correctly and every time to prevent the spread of a sexually transmitted diseases. You should also get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- If you are HCV positive, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.

Hepatitis C is **not** spread by sneezing, hugging, coughing, food or water, sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, or casual contact. Persons should not be excluded from work, school, play, child-care or other settings on the basis of a hepatitis C infection.

## **Who is Most at Risk of Infection?**

The following groups are at high to intermediate risk and are recommended for testing:

- Injecting drug users
- Recipients of blood clotting factors made before 1987
- Dialysis patients
- Persons who received blood transfusions or transplants before 1992
- People with undiagnosed liver problems
- Infants born to infected mothers

The following groups are at lower risk. Anyone who wants to get tested should ask their doctor.

- Healthcare/public safety workers (testing recommended after a possible exposure)
- People having sex with multiple partners
- People having sex with an infected steady partner

\*Persons at risk for HCV infection might also be at risk for infection with hepatitis B virus (HBV) or HIV.

## **How is Hepatitis C infection diagnosed and treated?**

A blood test can detect the presence of hepatitis C virus in the body. Infected persons should be evaluated by their doctor for liver disease. There are two drugs licensed for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C. Drinking alcohol can worsen liver disease.

## **Are there long term consequences to a Hepatitis C infection?**

- Chronic infection: 55%-85% of infected persons
- Chronic liver disease: 70% of chronically infected persons
- Most common reason for liver transplant

For more information please visit: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/index](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/index)