



HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C is a virus that primarily attacks the liver. Problems caused by hepatitis C can range in severity. It can cause a mild infection that lasts only a few weeks, or it can go on to cause a chronic infection. If chronic hepatitis C is not treated, it can become a serious, lifelong illness that can lead to liver failure and cancer. Effective treatment is available for hepatitis C.

Who is at most at risk for hepatitis C?

- People who currently use or have ever used injection drugs
- Baby boomers (born 1945-1965)
- People who received a blood transfusion before 1992
- Hemodialysis patients or people who spent many years on dialysis for kidney failure
- People who received body piercings or tattoos done with non-sterile instruments
- People with known exposures to the hepatitis C virus, such as:
 - People exposed to hepatitis C in a healthcare setting
 - Recipients of blood or organs from a donor who tested positive for the hepatitis C virus
 - People living with HIV
 - Children born to mothers who have hepatitis C

How is hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread by:

- Sharing needles or other equipment used to inject drugs
- Needle stick injuries in health care settings
- Being born to a mother who has hepatitis C
- Receiving a tattoo in an unprofessional setting

Less commonly, people can get hepatitis C by:

- Sharing personal care items that may come into contact with blood, like razors or toothbrushes
- Having sexual contact with a person who has hepatitis C

How is hepatitis C treated?

All types of hepatitis C can be treated through medication prescribed by a doctor.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Many people with hepatitis C do not have symptoms. About 20-30% of people with chronic hepatitis C will develop irreversible liver damage, known as cirrhosis, which may lead to liver failure, liver cancer, and death.

Symptoms that do occur may show up 6 to 7 weeks after exposure, and can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Yellow skin and/or eyes (jaundice)
- Depression

How can I prevent hepatitis C?

- Do not share needles or equipment used to inject drugs
- Do not share needles or equipment used for piercings or tattoos
- Use condoms during sex
- Follow safety precautions and wear protective clothing and gloves when disposing of contaminated sharp objects

What should I do if I think I have hepatitis C?

Get tested if you think you have been exposed to hepatitis C. Treatment is available, and hepatitis C can be cured if treated effectively.

WHO TO CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Hepatitis C, call Denver Public Health at (303) 602-3540.

Sources: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [Denver Public Health](#)