

Getting Tested for Hepatitis C

Why it's Important for People Born from 1945 through 1965

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (known as HCV).

Hepatitis C can slowly cause damage to your liver over time with no symptoms. This can lead to cirrhosis (liver disease) and liver failure. It can also cause liver cancer. Hepatitis C becomes long-lasting (chronic) in about 7 to 8 out of 10 people. It is the main reason for a liver transplant.

Getting Tested for Hepatitis C

If you were born from 1945 through 1965, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you get tested for Hepatitis C because:

- 3 out of 4 adults with hepatitis C were born during these years
- the number of adults with liver disease and liver damage from hepatitis C is on the rise
- most people who have hepatitis C do not know they are infected
- lifesaving care and treatment can be started if they are infected
- early diagnosis can help prevent liver damage, liver cancer and cirrhosis.

How Hepatitis C is Found

Blood tests are used to confirm hepatitis C.

How Hepatitis C is Spread

The infection is spread:

- by having direct contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person
- by having received blood, blood products or organs from an infected person before effective screening was introduced in the early 1990s
- by sharing needles with an infected person (such as shooting illegal “street” drugs, or getting a tattoo by a tattoo artist who reuses needles, doesn’t follow good sanitation practices or both)
- by sharing personal items that may have the infected person’s blood on them (such as razor or toothbrush)
- during childbirth, from a mother to the baby.

Hepatitis C is rarely spread through sexual activity.

Hepatitis C cannot be spread by food and water, casual contact (such as a hug or handshake), breastfeeding, hugging or kissing, or sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses.

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

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Symptoms

Most people who have hepatitis C do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected.

When symptoms do appear they can include:

- jaundice (yellow eyes)
- dark urine
- abdominal pain
- fatigue (tiredness)
- loss of appetite
- joint pain
- nausea (upset) and vomiting (throwing up)
- fever
- clay-colored stools.

Treatment

If you have hepatitis C, you and your health care provider will decide what type of treatment is right for you. Successful treatments can get rid of the virus from your body and prevent liver damage, cirrhosis and maybe liver cancer.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.