



What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a chronic liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). An estimated 250,000 people in Canada are infected and between 3,200 and 5,000 are newly infected each year.

Why is hepatitis C a health concern?

For many, chronic hepatitis C can show no symptoms for years, but may eventually lead to liver damage and liver cancer.

Could I have hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is spread through infected blood to blood contact. Seventy to 80 per cent of hepatitis C transmission is due to injection drug use and sharing of contaminated needles and drugusing materials.

What are the risk factors?

The most common risk factors for HCV infection include:

 Injecting or snorting drugs, tattooing, body piercing with unsterile equipment or techniques;

- Sharing personal care articles such as razors, scissors, nail clippers or tooth-brushes with an infected person;
- Being born to a mother with HCV;
- Exposure in the workplace by getting pricked by a needle or sharp equipment that has infected blood on it; and/or
- Unprotected sexual activity that includes contact with blood of an infected person.

Why do I need my liver?

A healthy liver helps digest food and also stores vitamins and minerals. But most importantly, the liver acts as a filter for chemicals and other substances that enter the body. It is also important in the manufacture of your blood and many proteins.

What if I have hepatitis C?

- The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to take a simple blood test.
- It can be treated. Talk to your health care provider. The health care provider will tell you what medication to take.
- Avoid alcohol or limit consumption.

If you have hepatitis C, you may infect others. To prevent spread of the virus:

- Do not share drug related equipment, cleaning with bleach may not kill HCV;
- Do not share toothbrushes, scissors, and razors or nail clippers that could be contaminated with blood;
- Cover open sores or breaks in skin; and
- If you have more than one sexual partner, or a new sexual partner, use condoms/dental dams to protect yourself against potential exposure to blood.

Hepatitis C is not spread by casual contact such as hugging, kissing, or shaking hands or being around someone who is sneezing or coughing.

Hepatitis C is not found in water or food.

Inform yourself. There is help and support available.



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