

Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C [hep-uh-TAHY-tis] is a type of liver infection that can spread from one person to another and can cause serious health problems. There is no vaccine available to help prevent the spread of hepatitis C.

What causes it?

Hepatitis C infections are caused by the spread of a germ called the **hepatitis C virus**. The virus spreads when blood or body fluids from someone with the infection get into your blood. These are the ways it can happen most often:

- Sharing needles to inject drugs
- Getting tattoos or piercings with a dirty needle
- Receiving blood, blood products (such as plasma, red blood cells, or platelets), or organs from a donor with hepatitis C
- Accidental needle sticks
- By being born to a mother with hepatitis C

A hepatitis C infection is less commonly caused by having sex with someone who has the disease.



Additional Information

The hepatitis C virus is NOT spread by:

- Breastfeeding
- Hugging or kissing
- Sharing forks, spoons, or drinking glasses
- Sneezing or coughing
- Food or water

What are the symptoms?

Many people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. Those who have symptoms early in their infection may have any of these:

- Yellow-colored skin or whites of the eyes
- Tiredness
- Dark-colored urine (pee)
- Abdominal (belly) pain
- Loss of appetite (not wanting to eat)
- Nausea

How is it diagnosed?

Hepatitis C can be diagnosed using one or more blood tests. Your healthcare provider will take a blood sample and be able to tell you in about 2 to 3 days if you have the infection.

Who is at risk for getting hepatitis C?

You could be at risk and should be tested for hepatitis C if you:

- Were born between 1945 and 1965
- Have ever injected drugs, even just once
- Were treated for a blood clotting problem before 1987
- Received blood or an organ from a donor before July 1992
- Have been receiving ongoing kidney dialysis
- Have liver disease or unusual liver test results
- Work in a healthcare or public safety job where you have been injured by a needle stick or other sharp object
- Have HIV

How is hepatitis C treated?

There are several medicines available to treat it, but treatments are different for each person. Some medicines may not help you while others may cause bad reactions. Your treatment will depend on:

- **How long you've had hepatitis C.** Some medicines work better if you've only had symptoms for a short amount of time.
- **What type of hepatitis C virus you have.** There are different types of hepatitis C viruses that spread in different parts of the world. Some medicines are more helpful at treating certain types than others.
- **Past treatments.** If you've been treated for hepatitis C before, it's important for your healthcare provider to know what worked well and what didn't.
- **Other medicines you take.** Some hepatitis C medicines are not safe to take with other medicines. Tell your healthcare provider about all medicines you currently take.
- **If you have liver damage.** Certain medicines may not be safe if you have liver damage.

- **Your healthcare insurance.** Your insurance may only pay for certain medicines. Also, some medicines are very expensive. Ask your health insurance company about what medicines it will pay for during your treatment. You can also ask your insurance company or provider about programs that offer discounts for some medicines.

Where can I learn more?

For more information about hepatitis C, contact your doctor, your local or state health department, or Infection Control at any Intermountain hospital. Use the space below to write down your questions.



When should I call a doctor?

Call your healthcare provider if your symptoms get worse or if you experience bad reactions to medicine. **See a healthcare provider immediately if you have hepatitis C and:**

- Feel confused or are having hallucinations
- Are vomiting blood or bleeding from rectum

Questions for my doctor: _____

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