

Facts and Myths About Hepatitis C

Facts: In order to contract hepatitis C you must have blood-to-blood contact with a person who has Hepatitis C. Contact may have happened by:

- Sharing needles and/or other "works" used to mix, cook or shoot drugs
- Sharing straws for snorting drugs
- Receiving blood, blood products, or solid organs
- Being on long-term kidney dialysis, without knowing you may have shared supplies/equipment
- Working at a job where you have a lot of contact with blood
- Being born to a mother who had hepatitis C at the time of your birth
- Having sex with an infected person without using a condom
- Living with someone who was infected and sharing items such as razors and toothbrushes

Myths: Hepatitis C is spread by:

- Casual contact: shaking or holding hands, skin-to-skin contact, sneezing, hugging, coughing
- Sharing silverware or drinking glasses, or through food or water

PROTECT YOURSELF

In order to protect yourself from getting Hepatitis C you should avoid **all** contact with infected blood

- Don't share needles, syringes, water, cotton or cookers for shooting drugs, medications or vitamins
- Don't share straws for sniffing drugs
- Don't share toothbrushes, razors or other personal care products
- Make sure any tattoos or piercings are done by licensed professionals using sterile equipment and clean latex gloves every time
- Limit sexual activity to one partner, and use latex condoms every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex

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Hepatitis C

WHAT IS IT?

WHO IS AT RISK?

Nearly five million people in the U.S. are infected with hepatitis C, and 200 million are infected worldwide

Currently, 8,000 - 10,000 people die each year in the U.S. from hepatitis C



**Acute and Communicable
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www.oshd.org

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease of the liver caused by the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV). This virus is found in the blood of persons who have the disease. Hepatitis C can lead to liver damage and sometimes death due to liver breakdown.

What Should I Look For?

Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis C

Always tired*

Mental confusion or foggy feeling*

Lack of concentration, attention or focus*

Eating problems*

Depression (feeling sad and hopeless)*

On-and-off nausea and vomiting*

Stomach pain and swelling*

Loss of appetite*

Mood swings

Night sweats

Flu-like illness

Muscle and joint pain

Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of eyes)

**most common*

Who Is at Risk for Hepatitis C?

High Risk

- Persons who received a blood transfusion, a blood product, or an organ transplant at any time before July 1992
- Persons who received treatment for blood clotting problems (hemophilia) before 1987
- Anyone who has been notified to have received blood from a Hepatitis C-infected – donor
- Persons who have had ongoing elevated liver function tests, even slightly above normal
- Hemodialysis patients (long-term)
- IV drug users, even if experimented just once

Low Risk

- Persons who have had a job with exposure to infected blood (health care workers)
- Persons who sniff drugs
- Anyone who has shared personal care items, such as razors, toothbrushes, pierced earrings, fingernail files and clippers, with infected persons
- Persons who have tattoos or body piercings
- Persons who have had sex with many partners without using a condom

Should I Get Tested?

If you are at high risk or have signs of liver disease (e.g., abnormal ALT liver enzyme tests), it is a good idea to contact your doctor or health clinic for information on where you can get tested. If you are at low risk, you may want to consider talking with your doctor about your options.

If you can't afford a doctor and/or are not currently on a health plan or insurance, call 1-800-SAFENET (723-3638) for information on low-cost clinics near you. (The Oregon Health Plan currently covers testing and treatment for hepatitis C and in most cases covers vaccines for both Hepatitis A and B.)

THERE IS NO VACCINE AVAILABLE TO PREVENT HEPATITIS C

If you need this material in an alternate format, call (503) 731-4024