# Hepatitis C

Frequently Asked Questions

## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a serious liver disease that results from infection with hepatitis C virus (HCV). It is transmitted through contact with the blood of an infected person. Most people who become infected with HCV will go on to develop chronic (long-term) hepatitis C. In the most serious cases, HCV can lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer.

## What are the symptoms?

Most people infected with HCV do not have symptoms. In people who do, symptoms might include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Grey-colored stools

## How does it spread?

Hepatitis C is transmitted through contact with the blood of an infected person. Today, most new infections happen when people who use drugs share needles and other equipment. More rarely, HCV is spread through exposure in a health care setting, such as through a needle stick. A growing body of evidence shows that men who have sex with men may get HCV through sexual contact.

## Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

Almost **5,000 chronic HCV** case reports were received by PDPH in 2009. Behaviors and situations that put people at risk for HCV include:

- Sharing needles and other drug use equipment—even if you've only ever injected drugs one time
- People who get a tattoo or body piercing at an unlicensed facility or "tattoo party"
- People living with HIV
- Unprotected sex with an infected person, particularly among men who have sex with men
- People who received blood, blood product, or organs before 1992

## How is it diagnosed and treated?

Hepatitis C is diagnosed through a blood test. People living with HCV should have their disease monitored regularly by a medical provider. Medication is available to treat HCV although the decision to start treatment should be discussed with a provider.

## What should I do if I think I have it?

If you think you have hepatitis C, contact your medical provider to discuss your symptoms.

## How is it prevented?

- Know your status—if you have risk factors, let your medical provider know you want to be tested
- Avoid sharing drug equipment—Prevention Point Philadelphia offers free syringes and other services for drug users
- Practice safe sex—use a condom
- Get tattoos or piercings at a licensed facility to assure equipment is sterile and safe

## Where can I find out more information about hepatitis C?

- Visit the CDC's website: http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/C/index.htm

*For more information contact your doctor, refer to http://www.phila.gov/Health/ or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.*