



**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
DIVISION OF DISEASE CONTROL**

## **HEPATITIS C**

### **What is hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C (formerly called non-A, non-B hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by a recently identified bloodborne virus.

### **Who gets hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C occurs most often in people who have received a blood transfusion or who have shared needles.

### **How is hepatitis C virus spread?**

Like hepatitis B, hepatitis C is spread by exposure to blood from an infected person, such as through a blood transfusion or sharing needles. The risk of sexual transmission has not been thoroughly studied but it appears to be small. There is no evidence that the hepatitis C virus can be transmitted by casual contact, through foods, or by coughing or sneezing. Transmission from mother-to-child appears to be uncommon.

### **What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?**

Some people experience appetite loss, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, vague stomach pain, and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes).

### **How soon after infection do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms may occur from two weeks to six months after exposure, but usually within two months.

### **When and for how long is an infected person able to spread hepatitis C?**

Some people carry the virus in their bloodstream and may remain contagious for years. The disease may be followed by complete recovery, or it may become chronic and cause symptoms for years.

## **How is hepatitis C diagnosed?**

Hepatitis C is diagnosed by a positive blood test for hepatitis C antibody.

## **What is the treatment for hepatitis C?**

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat people with the acute form of hepatitis C. However, the FDA has approved a drug called recombinant alpha-interferon for treating people with chronic hepatitis C.

## **What are the possible consequences of hepatitis C?**

Approximately 25 percent of people infected with hepatitis C virus will become sick with jaundice or other symptoms of hepatitis. Fifty percent of these individuals may go on to develop chronic liver disease.

## **How can hepatitis C be prevented?**

People who have had hepatitis C should be aware that their blood and possibly other body fluids are potentially infectious. Therefore, infected persons should avoid sharing toothbrushes, razors, needles, etc. In addition, infected people must not donate blood and should inform their dental or medical care providers so that proper precautions can be followed. The risk of sexual transmission of hepatitis C virus has not been thoroughly investigated but appears to be minimal. Several studies suggest that spread seldom occurs from people with chronic hepatitis C disease to their steady sexual partners. Therefore, limitations on sexual activity with steady partners may not be needed. However, people with acute illness and multiple sexual partners may be a greater risk and should use condoms to reduce the risk of acquiring or transmitting the hepatitis C virus, as well as other sexually transmitted infections.

## **Is there a vaccine for hepatitis C?**

At the present time, a hepatitis C vaccine is not available.