

# Hepatitis C

## Fact Sheet

www.cdc.gov/hepatitis  
1-888-4HEP-CDC



### SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- jaundice
- fatigue
- dark urine
- abdominal pain
- loss of appetite
- nausea

80% of persons have no sign or symptoms.

### CAUSE

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

### LONG-TERM EFFECTS

- Chronic infection: 75-85% of infected persons
- Chronic liver disease: 70% of chronically infected persons
- Deaths from chronic liver disease: <3%
- Leading indication for liver transplant

### TRANSMISSION

- Occurs when blood or body fluids from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected.
- HCV is spread through sharing needles or “works” when “shooting” drugs, through needlesticks or sharps exposures on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TESTING BASED ON RISK FOR HCV INFECTION

Persons at risk for HCV infection might also be at risk for infection with hepatitis B virus (HBV) or HIV.

#### Recommendations for Testing Based on Risk for HCV Infection

\* Anyone who wants to get tested should ask their doctor.

| PERSONS   | RISK OF INFECTION | TESTING RECOMMENDED?      |
|---|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Injecting drug users                                | High              | Yes                       |
| Recipients of clotting factors made before 1987     | High              | Yes                       |
| Hemodialysis patients                               | Intermediate      | Yes                       |
| Recipients of blood and/or solid organs before 1992 | Intermediate      | Yes                       |
| People with undiagnosed liver problems              | Intermediate      | Yes                       |
| Infants born to infected mothers                    | Intermediate      | After 12-18 months old    |
| Healthcare/Public safety workers                    | Low               | Only after known exposure |
| People having sex with multiple partners            | Low               | No *                      |
| People having sex with an infected steady partner   | Low               | No *                      |

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Page 2

### PREVENTION

- There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.
- Do not shoot drugs. If you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, never share needles, syringes, water, or "works", and get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- If you are a healthcare or public safety worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and sharps; get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- HCV can be spread by sex, but this is very rare. If you are having sex with more than one steady sex partner, use condoms\* correctly and every time to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. You should also get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- If you are HCV positive, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.

### TREATMENT & MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

- HCV positive persons should be evaluated by their doctor for liver disease.
- Interferon and ribavirin are two drugs licensed for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C.
- Interferon can be taken alone or in combination with ribavirin. Combination therapy, using pegylated interferon and ribavirin, is currently the treatment of choice.
- Combination therapy can get rid of the virus in up to 5 out of 10 persons for genotype 1 and in up to 8 out of 10 persons for genotype 2 and 3.
- Drinking alcohol can make you liver disease worse.

### STATISTICS & TRENDS

- Number of new infections per year has declined from an average of 240,000 in the 1980s to about 25,000 in 2001.
- Most infections are due to illegal injection drug use.
- Transfusion-associated cases occurred prior to blood donor screening; now occurs in less than one per million transfused unit of blood.
- Estimated 3.9 million (1.8%) Americans have been infected with HCV, of whom 2.7 million are chronically infected.

\* The efficacy of latex condoms in preventing infection with HCV is unknown, but their proper use may reduce transmission.