



## FACT SHEET

### Hepatitis C

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#### What is it?

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes infection of the liver.

#### How serious is Hepatitis C?

There are an estimated 3.5 million chronically infected persons in the U.S. 75-85% of people who get hepatic C will become chronic carriers (chronic infection). About 10-20% of persons with chronic hepatitis C will develop serious liver problems 20 to 30 years after becoming infected. 80% of persons with chronic hepatitis C appear to suffer only mild injury to their liver over time and have minimal or no symptoms of illness.

#### Symptoms

- Symptoms usually begin 6 weeks to 6 months after exposure to the virus (average 2 to 4 months).
- Symptoms can include nausea (upset stomach), loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of energy, fever and abdominal cramps (stomach or side pain).
- Dark yellow or brown urine, pale or white-colored stool (bowel movements), and jaundice (yellow eyes or skin).
- Less than 30% of persons with a new infection get any symptoms at all and less than 20% get jaundice.
- Persons can have all or only a few of these symptoms.

#### How is it spread?

- The virus is primarily spread through direct contact with blood, such as sharing injection drug equipment and punctures with sharp instruments.
- Hepatitis C can be spread through sexual contact but this is uncommon.
- Hepatitis C can be spread from a mother to her baby at the time of delivery but this is uncommon (only 5 out of 100 babies born to women with hepatitis C will become infected).

- Hepatitis C used to be spread through blood products prior to 1992 but this almost never occurs today.
- People can spread hepatitis C to others even if they don't have any symptoms.
- Hepatitis B is not spread by kissing, hugging, sneezing, or by saliva.

#### Diagnosis and treatment

- Hepatitis C is diagnosed with a series of
- The screening test is a blood test called the ELISA or EIA antibody test. If the screening test is positive, a confirmatory antibody test called RIBA antibody test or a test for the virus (HCVRNA) should be done
- There is no medicine or treatment that will make the symptoms go away faster or prevent chronic infection.
- There are treatments for persons with chronic hepatitis C but not everyone needs them. The most common treatment includes both interferon (a shot) and ribavirin (a pill).
- Rest, a low fat diet, and plenty are fluids are recommended. Avoid drugs and alcohol during any acute (new) illness.

#### Prevention

- There is no medicine or treatment that can prevent illness after an exposure to hepatitis C.
- There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.
- If you use injection drugs, you should try to get into treatment to stop drug use. If you cannot, do not share needles, drugs, mixing solution, or works.
- Practice safe sex if you have more than 1 sexual partner. (use condoms for any sexual activity, including oral, anal, and vaginal sex).
- Do not share personal hygiene items that might get contaminated with blood, such as razors, nail clippers, or toothbrushes,
- Cover all cuts and open sores with a bandage.
- If you have hepatitis C, do not donate blood, plasma, organs or semen.

## Who should be tested for Hepatitis C?

- You ever used injection drugs, even one time.
- You received a blood or blood products or an organ donation prior to 1992.
- You were notified that you received blood or blood products from a donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C.
- You received a blood product for clotting problems prior to 1987.
- You are a health care or public safety worker, who has been exposed to blood from a person with hepatitis C, including an injury with a needle or sharp instrument.
- Your mother had hepatitis C when you were born.
- You have ever been on long-term kidney dialysis.

## If I have Hepatitis C, what do I need to do?

- **Avoid drinking alcohol.**
- Talk with your health care provider before taking any new medications, herbal remedies, or over the counter medications (including acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and aspirin).
- Get immunized against hepatitis A and B (if you have not already had these infections).
- See a health care provider regularly who can monitor your liver function.
- Protect yourself. If you use injection drugs, you can get reinfected with a different type of hepatitis C or other diseases spread through blood contact such as HIV and hepatitis B. Do not share or reuse any injection equipment.

**Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-771-5810**