



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). If untreated, it can lead to serious liver disease including cirrhosis, fibrosis, and cancer.

How do you get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is spread through contact with infected blood. People who have received blood transfusions, IV drug users, household members and sexual partners of infected persons, and people who may be exposed to other people's blood at work are at highest risk of getting Hepatitis C. In some cases, HCV can also be spread through sexual contact or unsanitary tattooing and piercing practices.

Baby boomers (born 1945 to 1965) are highly recommended to get tested for hepatitis C, at least once, regardless of any known blood or behavior risk.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Many persons with hepatitis C infection may not experience any symptoms.

If they do appear, the symptoms may include loss of appetite, nausea, stomach pain, fatigue, and jaundice (yellowing) of the skin and whites of the eyes. If the infection continues for more than 6 months, the condition is called chronic hepatitis C.

When do symptoms start?

If they do appear, the symptoms usually begin 7 weeks following infection with the virus, but the onset can range from 2 to 24 weeks.

For how long is a person contagious?

A person with hepatitis C is believed to be contagious one or more weeks before the start of symptoms and throughout the disease. People with chronic hepatitis C are contagious for life.

What is the treatment for hepatitis C?

HCV positive persons should see their doctor regularly to check liver function. There are some medicines that a doctor can prescribe to cure people with chronic HCV infection. There is no vaccine or immunity for HCV, so people who have cleared it can get infected again. HCV patients should avoid drinking alcohol.

How can you keep from getting it?

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

Take measures to avoid contact with blood and other body fluids that may be contagious for hepatitis C.

Do not inject drugs. If you can't stop, never share needles, syringes, water or "works".

Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them, such as razors or toothbrushes.

If your job requires exposure to other people's blood, always follow barrier precautions and safely handle needles and sharps.

If you have sex with more than one partner, use latex condoms correctly every time you have sex.

Choose tattoo artists and piercing providers carefully. Make sure they follow hygienic practices.

Persons infected with hepatitis must not donate blood, organs or tissue.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm>