



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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Hepatitis C

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease of the liver caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person. About 4 million Americans have Hepatitis C, which accounts for 40% of all liver disease. Hepatitis C has infected four times as many people as HIV.

Why Should You Be Tested?

Many people infected with Hepatitis C are unaware that they have the disease. They may be free of symptoms and the disease can go undetected for years. You may be at risk for Hepatitis C and should contact your health care provider for a blood test if you:

- Have had body piercing or a tattoo when the equipment was not sterile.
- Were notified that you received blood from a donor who later tested positive for Hepatitis C
- Received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before July 1992
- Received a blood product for clotting problems produced before 1987
- Have ever been on long term kidney dialysis
- Are a health care worker who has had an exposure to blood
- Have evidence of liver disease

- Hepatitis C can be transmitted sexually and from an infected mother to an unborn child.
- Have ever injected drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago

Symptoms of Hepatitis C:

Most people have no symptoms. Some people can have some of the following symptoms:

- jaundice-yellowing of skin/eyes
- fatigue
- loss of appetite
- intermittent nausea or vomiting

What should you do if you think you may have been exposed to the Hepatitis C virus?

You should make an appointment to see a health care provider. At the University Health Center, a test can be performed to detect antibodies to the Hepatitis C virus. There is a \$3 lab fee for the test.

How can you protect yourself from Hepatitis C?

- Avoid sharing needles to inject drugs
- Use latex condoms during sexual intercourse (oral, anal, and vaginal)
- Avoid sharing personal items such as toothbrushes or razors, which may have blood on them.

- Consider the health risks if you are thinking of getting a tattoo or body piercing. Sterile tools, needles and ink or disposable needles must be used to prevent infection.

Is there a vaccine available?

There is currently no vaccine to protect against Hepatitis C.

What happens if you are diagnosed with Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C will result in a chronic infection in 85% of infected persons. However, only 25-30% of people with infections have symptoms. There is drug therapy for the treatment of persons with chronic Hepatitis C. People with Hepatitis C should also get vaccinated against Hepatitis A & B.

For additional information contact:

- The Hepatitis Foundation International (800-891-0707)
<http://www.hepfi.org>
- The American Liver Foundation (800-223-0179)
<http://www.liverfoundation.org>
- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (301-654-3810)

Revised 12.06

Published for the University of Maryland community.

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