

# HEPATITIS C AND YOUNG PEOPLE



## Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C, also known as Hep C, is an infectious virus that is spread from one person to another through contact with infected blood. Most of those who have it often have no symptoms and do not feel sick until late stages of the disease. It can cause the liver to swell and form scars, which can lead to liver failure. There are vaccinations for Hepatitis A and B, but not for Hep C.

### Fact?

**Hepatitis C is 10X more infectious than HIV. In the US, 4X more people have Hep C than HIV.**

## Why are youth and young adults at risk?

Recent reports state that the outbreaks of hepatitis C among those under **30 years old who inject drugs is much higher than those who do not**. Other risk factors, such as tattooing and piercing, are increasing the rise of Hep C infections among youth and young adults.

### Fact:

**Studies show that after only one year of injecting drugs as many as 20% are infected with hepatitis C.**

## Some of the ways Hep C is spread:

- Sharing needles, spoons, straws, water or other items for IV drug use, steroids, or hormones
- Sharing used or nonsterile tattoo needles and ink

- Sharing razors, toothbrushes, and personal care items that may have blood on them
- If you have a job where you might be exposed to needle sticks or blood

## **What are the signs and symptoms?**

Most people with hepatitis C may not show major symptoms immediately, therefore leaving the virus untreated for years. However, just because there are no symptoms does not mean that the virus is not causing damage to the body.

Most common symptoms of hepatitis C are:

- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Fever, nausea, and vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Abdominal pain

## **What do I do if I think that I am at risk?**

If you think that you are at risk, talk with a doctor to be tested. To detect hepatitis C, an antibody test will be done to determine **if you have been exposed. If positive, a viral load test will measure the amount of virus in your body.**

## **What if I have hepatitis C?**

If you have Hep C, it is best to talk to a doctor about getting treatment. Most people are now cured of hepatitis C after completing treatments.

## **Can I get hepatitis C again if I am cured?**

Yes – Hepatitis C is a disease that you can get again, even if you have been cured. To prevent reinfection, avoid behaviors that put you at risk.

## **Can I get hepatitis C through sex?**

Yes – Hep C is not in semen or vaginal fluid, but it is in blood. If there is blood present in both partners, then Hep C can be spread. Keep in mind: even the smallest amounts of blood that cannot be seen can transmit Hep C.



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