

UPDATED

# Frequently Asked Questions about Hepatitis C



Hepatitis Education  
Canada

# What is hepatitis C?



Liver

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes damage to the liver. The liver does over 500 jobs for the body.

There is **no vaccine** for hepatitis C.

# How is hepatitis C spread?



The hepatitis C virus is spread when the **blood** of a person with hepatitis C gets into another person's **bloodstream**\*, such as through an opening in the skin.

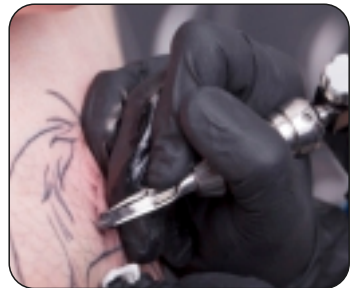
\* Sometimes called **blood-to-blood** contact.

# Hepatitis C is easily spread by:



- sharing injection equipment or other works (e.g., needles syringes, water, spoons)

- sharing unsterilized piercing or tattooing equipment\* or tattoo ink\*



Tattoo image: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/tattoo-process-explained-step-by-step.html>

\*The risk of spreading hepatitis C is higher with home or prison tattooing

# Hepatitis C can sometimes be spread by:

- ◆ sharing drug snorting equipment



- ◆ unprotected\* sex, **when there is blood**, including sex between:
  - ◆ men and women
  - ◆ men and men
  - ◆ or during sexual assault (for both victim and offender)

\*The risk of passing hep C through sex is higher when there is a co-infection with HIV, HBV or other sexually passed infections that cause sores or cuts.

# Hepatitis C is less often spread by:

🔴 sharing personal items that might have small amounts of blood on them, like:

🔴 toothbrushes

🔴 dental floss

🔴 razors, or

🔴 nail clippers

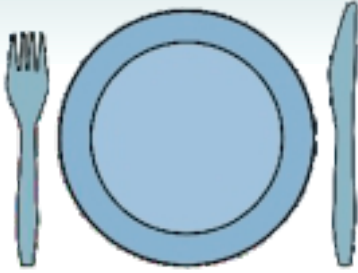


🔴 accidentally being poked with a used needle



🔴 a mother passing it to her infant during childbirth

# Hepatitis C is not spread through:



- water
- food
- sharing dishes

...or through day-to-day activities like:

- hugging or kissing
- sharing clothes



- coughing, sneezing
- using public toilets or swimming

# Are there symptoms from hepatitis C?



At first, most people will have no or only a few symptoms, but...



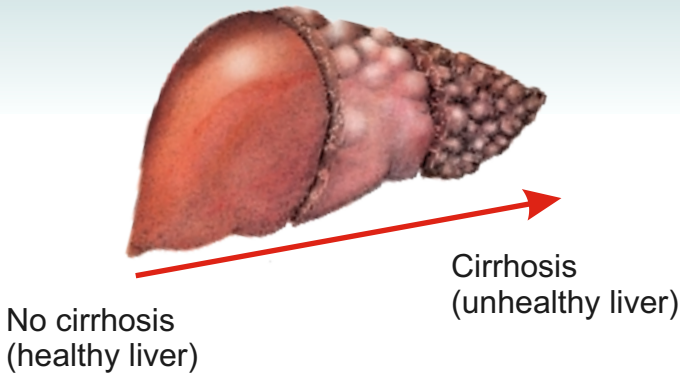
# ... over time some develop symptoms such as

- feeling tired
- muscle pain
- joint pain
- headaches
- itchy skin



- pain in stomach area
- depression
- anxiety
- “brain fog”
- nausea

# Is hepatitis C a death sentence?



**No!** Most people who get hepatitis C do not die from it. But, over a long period of time, some will develop:

- cirrhosis (the liver shrinks, hardens and does not work properly)
- liver cancer
- or may need a liver transplant

# Do people with hepatitis C need to see a provider even if they feel fine?



**Yes!** Every 6-12 months the liver should be checked for damage. Even if a person feels well and has no symptoms, hepatitis C can still be damaging their liver.

# What does a hepatitis C viral load (HCV RNA\*) test check?

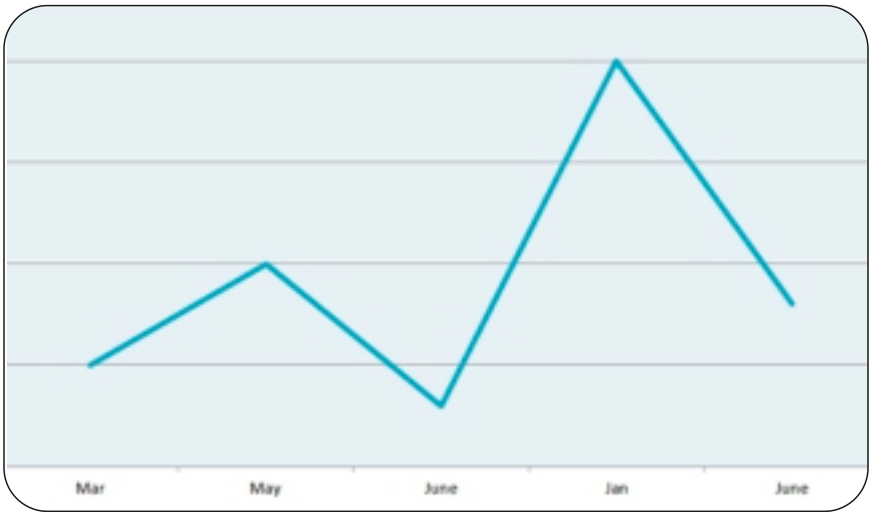


It checks if the virus is in a person's blood. It can tell if:

- a person currently has hepatitis C (an HCV antibody test alone does not tell if a person currently has hepatitis C)
- treatment is working

\*Some RNA tests only check if the HCV virus is in the blood; others check for how much virus is in the blood.

# Do 'normal' ALT levels mean a normal liver, or no liver damage?



Yes and no. It is common for ALT levels to go up and down. Sometimes normal levels occur when the liver is damaged.

# Since it is possible to have liver damage even if ALT levels are normal...



... health care providers will recommend a FibroScan<sup>®</sup>, blood test, or a liver biopsy to check for liver damage and cirrhosis.

# Can hepatitis C be cured?



Yes! New treatments cure about 90% of those who complete treatment. They are:

- all-oral (no injections)
- as short as 8 weeks

Talk to your provider about what is best for your situation.

# Can people who are taking alcohol or other drugs get treatment?



Yes! Talk to your provider about finding the best treatment plan for you.



# Are there side-effects from hepatitis C antiviral treatment?

Side-effects with new treatments may include:

- headaches
- tiredness
- weakness



Talk with your health care provider about how to manage treatment side-effects.



Hepatitis C **symptoms** and treatment **side-effects** can be different for each person.

Some people may need support from health care providers, family, friends, or peers.

# Notes

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This resource was created by Hepatitis Education Canada. It would not have been possible without the valuable contributions from individuals affected by hepatitis C and service providers across Canada, support from the University of British Columbia and the BC Centre for Disease Control, and funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada\*.

For more information  
visit: [www.hepatitiseducation.ca](http://www.hepatitiseducation.ca)  
or e-mail: [info@hepatitiseducation.ca](mailto:info@hepatitiseducation.ca)



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\* The views expressed in this booklet do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

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