



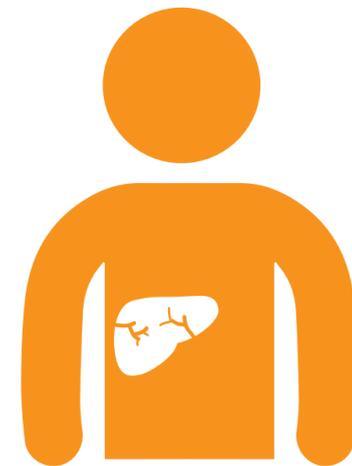


# HEPATITIS C INFORMATION FOR IMMIGRANTS AND NEWCOMERS



## HEPATITIS C IS COMMON AMONG IMMIGRANTS AND NEWCOMERS TO CANADA.

Canadian immigrants usually acquire Hepatitis C (Hep C) in their countries of origin before coming to Canada. One in three people affected by Hep C in Canada is foreign-born, mostly from countries with high rates of Hep C. This is why it's important for you to know more about Hep C.



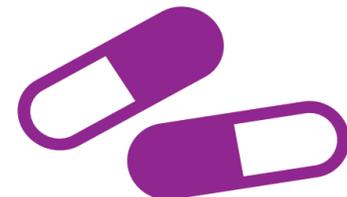
## HEP C IS A VIRUS THAT INJURES THE LIVER.

The liver is an essential organ that helps the body fight infections, break down toxins (poisons) and drugs, digest food, and more. You cannot live without your liver.

## YOU CAN HAVE HEP C AND NOT KNOW IT.

Some people can live with Hep C for 20 to 30 years or more without feeling sick, even though the virus is still injuring the liver. Over time, the liver damage gets worse, making it hard for this vital organ to function.

## TREATMENT CAN CURE HEP C.



Most people need treatment to cure Hep C. Newer treatments that are easy to take are now available in Canada. They come in pill form, have few side effects, are taken for a short time and are much more effective than older Hep C treatments.

## A CURE WILL CLEAR THE VIRUS FROM THE BODY BUT DOES NOT PROTECT AGAINST RE-INFECTION.

People do not develop immunity to Hep C after being cured of the virus, so it is possible to get re-infected. Taking steps to avoid re-exposure will help you continue to live well once you have finished Hep C treatment.

## TESTING IS THE ONLY WAY TO FIND OUT IF YOU HAVE HEP C.

It usually takes **two** blood tests to tell whether you have Hep C.

1. The **hepatitis C antibody test** checks whether you have ever come in contact with the virus.
2. The **confirmatory test** confirms whether the virus is currently in your body.

Testing is getting simpler all the time. Speak to your healthcare provider and ensure you are receiving your confirmatory test result and not just the hepatitis C antibody test.



## HEP C IS PASSED BLOOD TO BLOOD.

Hepatitis C does not spread through casual contact or by hugging, kissing or touching a person living with the virus. Nor does it spread if new or properly sterilized equipment is used during medical procedures or drug use.

The virus gets into the blood through breaks or tears in the skin or other protective layers of the body. Hep C is a strong virus—it can live outside of the body for many days. This means that the virus can be spread via dried blood.

### Hep C is often transmitted by:

- Re-using medical, dental or surgical equipment that was not sterilized properly. In Canada, medical, dental and surgical equipment is sterilized properly. In some medical facilities outside of Canada, this equipment may not be properly sterilized.
- Getting a blood transfusion or organ transplant that was not screened for Hep C. In Canada, donated blood has been screened for Hep C since 1990. Some countries did not screen until more recently.



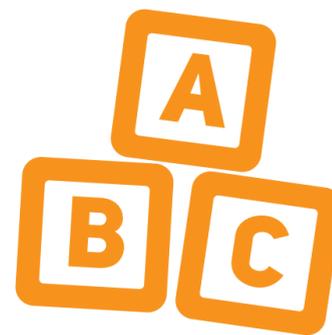
- Sharing needles and equipment used for preparing and injecting drugs (including needles, syringes, tourniquets or ties, cookers, spoons, filters, water, swabs).



- Re-using tools for piercing and tattooing (including needles, ink and ink pots) or for electrolysis or acupuncture.

### Other ways Hep C can get inside the body:

- Sharing or borrowing personal care items that might have blood on them, such as razors, nail clippers and toothbrushes. This includes shaving at community barber shops, common in Pakistan and India, when razors are re-used.
- Some practices used by traditional healers that involve cutting or piercing the skin, such as wet cupping, which is common in the Middle East and West Asia, or acupuncture when new needles and sterilized equipment is not used.
- Sexual transmission of hepatitis C is not common. The chance increases with anal sex, especially when blood is present or one of the partners also has HIV or another sexually transmitted infection.
- The risk of Hep C passing from mother to child during pregnancy or childbirth is generally low in Canada. However, it might be higher in cases of children born to mothers with Hep C in other countries where healthcare practices are different.



## HEP C IS DIFFERENT FROM HEP A AND HEP B.

Hepatitis A is transmitted when people unknowingly ingest fecal matter, usually through contaminated water or food. Nearly all people clear Hep A without taking medication, and the body becomes immune to the virus.

Hepatitis B can be spread when the blood, semen or vaginal fluid of a person who has the virus enters the body of another person who does not have the virus. The virus can also be passed to a baby during childbirth. Most people who get Hep B as adults clear the virus on their own and their body becomes immune to the virus. The chance of developing chronic Hep B becomes greater if a person is exposed to the virus at a young age. Those who do develop a chronic infection can go on to develop long-term liver problems. Treatment can help slow down and manage the virus. Unfortunately, chronic hepatitis B is not currently curable.

There are vaccines to protect against Hep A and Hep B, and you can get them. There is no vaccine for Hep C, but there is a cure.

## SPEAK TO SOMEONE ABOUT HEP C.



### Information line at Toronto Public Health

In Ontario, this province-wide information line about hepatitis, HIV and sexual health offers service in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Tagalog, Mandarin, Cantonese and many other languages. When you call, you may be given a specific time to talk to a counsellor in your preferred language. They can also refer you to a clinic in Ontario to get tested.

### Call toll-free in Ontario:

# 1-800-668-2437



Monday to Friday:  
10 am – 10:30 pm  
Saturday and Sunday:  
11 am – 3 pm

**Outside of Ontario, contact your healthcare provider.**



**Managing Editor:** Fozia Tanveer  
**Design:** Ty Best (tybest.ca)  
**Layout:** David Vereschagin, Quadrat Communications  
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Information in this brochure is not medical advice. Decisions about treatment should always be made with the advice of a doctor who knows about Hep C. Treatment changes, so talk to a doctor to get the latest information.

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