

HEPATITIS C: GET THE FACTS!

KNOW YOUR RISKS & GET TESTED



WHAT IS HEPATITIS C? HOW IS HEPATITIS C SPREAD?

Hepatitis C is a virus that affects the liver. It lives in an infected person's blood and is spread when the blood (or body fluids containing blood) of someone living with hepatitis C comes in direct contact with someone else's blood. High risk activities for hepatitis C include sharing equipment for drug use, piercing and/or tattooing, and receiving a blood transfusion or other blood products before 1990. Hepatitis C can live outside the body for some time. It can be spread by very small particles (bits) of blood —sometimes so small you can't see them. Bleach *doesn't* kill hepatitis C.

HEPATITIS C RISKY ACTIVITIES & HOW TO REDUCE YOUR RISK!

High Risk—Sharing Drug Equipment like needles (rigs), filters, water (wash), straws (snorters), pipes, spoons, and cookers

- ◆ Never use someone else's drug equipment or let them use yours
- ◆ Use a lighter or knife to mark your needle (rig) so you know it's yours
- ◆ Keep in mind, cleaning drug equipment with bleach doesn't kill hepatitis C
- ◆ When fixing, have your own clean space to get ready
- ◆ Use the needle exchange program in your area



High Risk—Sharing Tattooing, Piercing, and Branding Equipment like needles, pens, ink caps, ink, pins, studs, jewelry, and branding steels

- ◆ Always use new needles, pens, ink, ink caps, pins, studs, steels, & jewelry
- ◆ Make sure all reusable equipment such as clamps are sterilized in an autoclave
- ◆ Don't give yourself or let a friend give you a tattoo, piercing or branding
- ◆ Never get a piercing with a stud gun—stud guns are difficult to sterilize
- ◆ Only get body art if you are ready—it's your body and your decision

HEPATITIS C is a virus that causes damage to your liver. It lives in blood and is spread when the blood of an infected person comes into direct contact with someone else's blood.

High Risk—Sharing Needles for Acupuncture

- ◆ Always use a registered acupuncturist and make sure that new needles are used

High Risk—Certain Medical Procedures Before 1990 such as receiving blood or blood products, organs and hemodialysis. Screening for hepatitis C started in June 1990 and was improved in 1992. Receiving blood or blood products, organs, and hemodialysis in Canada is a very small risk (1 in 1 million)

- ◆ If you have had any of these procedures before 1992, get tested for hepatitis C

Low Risk—Sharing Personal Care Items such as razors, toothbrushes, scissors, and nail clippers. Small particles (bits) of blood can remain on these items following use.

- ◆ Never share these items with anyone—even your best friend or partner

Low Risk—Having Unprotected Sex such as vaginal, anal, or oral sex is low risk for hepatitis C but high risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Having sex with lots of partners, and the presence of blood, may increase the risk of hepatitis C.

- ◆ Use a condom every time you have vaginal, oral and anal sex and don't share sex toys

Low Risk—Mother-to-Child Transmission during pregnancy occurs in 5-10% of cases. There is some risk to infants of breastfeeding mothers if the nipples are cracked or bleeding.

- ◆ Do not breastfeed if your nipples are cracked or bleeding



Low Risk—Accidental Exposure to Blood through fighting, giving first aid, or a needle-stick injury (needle-stick injury rate of transmission is 1.8%)

- ◆ Always take precautions such as wearing latex gloves when there is blood present and treat all blood as if it has the hepatitis C virus
- ◆ If you have been pricked with a used needle or a cut has been exposed to someone else's blood (1) make the prick/cut bleed without pinching immediate area (2) wash the prick or cut with soap and water for 10 minutes (3) rinse with water or saline (4) go to the hospital for assessment right away
- ◆ If you get blood in your eyes or face, rinse with clean water for 15 minutes

WHY GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C?

When you get tested for hepatitis C you are taking control of your health. If you have hepatitis C, the sooner you know the better. You can look into treatment options and lead a lifestyle that reduces the impact of hepatitis C on your body. You can also take steps to prevent giving it to someone else.



SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C?

It is recommended you get tested for hepatitis C if you:

- ◆ Have shared any type of drug equipment—even once
- ◆ Had a tattoo or body piercing from a nonprofessional source (for example in prison or at a friend's house)
- ◆ Received a blood transfusion, organ transplant, or any other blood products and/or had hemodialysis before 1992
- ◆ Have been pricked by a used needle
- ◆ Had acupuncture treatment from a nonprofessional source
- ◆ Were born to a mother who had hepatitis C at the time of your birth
- ◆ Have had unprotected sex with someone who is living with hepatitis C
- ◆ Have been accidentally exposed to blood and think it may have come into direct contact with your blood through something like a cut or scratch

GETTING TESTED

is the only way to find out if you have hepatitis C. Many people live long happy lives with hepatitis C. Knowing you have it, lets you take control!

HOW DO I GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C?

The test for hepatitis C is a blood test called the Hepatitis C Antibody Test. If you have ever had the hepatitis C virus, your body has hepatitis C specific antibodies that fight the virus. This test checks to see if you have any of these. You can get the Hepatitis C Antibody Test from:

- ◆ A family doctor
- ◆ Some community health clinics—ask your local clinic!
- ◆ Your local sexual health clinic /Public Health

If your Hepatitis C Antibody Test is positive your doctor will often have you get a second test. This test checks to see if you actually still have hepatitis C. In 15-25% of cases, a person will naturally get over hepatitis C—no one knows why.

CAN I GET TESTED AT ANYTIME?

It takes between 5-12 weeks after infection to get enough hepatitis C antibodies in your blood to show up in the Hepatitis C Antibody Test. If you get tested during this time your test result might not be accurate—this is called the 'window period'. If you want to be sure, get tested after 5 weeks, then after 3 months.

Sources: (1) *Surviving Hepatitis C and Risks in Prison...the Facts* (JHSGM, 2002); (2) *Living with Hepatitis C—A Support Guide* (Hepatitis C Moncton); (3) *Are you Thinking About Being Tested for Hepatitis C* (Hepatitis C Moncton); (4) *Hepatitis C—Handbook for Injectors* (Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS, 2001); (5) Canadian Hemophilia Society (Personal Communication, March 9, 2005); (6) *HVC—Things You Should Know* (CAS); (7) *Accidental Exposure to HIV: Self Care* (CANAC, 1998).

For more information on hepatitis C, body art, safer sex, and/or HIV please call our toll free, anonymous, and confidential help-line at 1-800-561-4009.

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