



HEPATITIS C

Information Manual



NOTE

The Hepatitis C Information Manual has been prepared for educational purposes only. The information on hepatitis C contained within this manual is general in nature and is not intended to be a substitute for advice from a health care professional. The information should also not be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Anyone with questions or concerns is encouraged to consult a health care professional.

Descriptions of treatments, medications or products in this document do not imply endorsement by the National Association of Friendship Centres.



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History and Background of Friendship Centres

The concept of a “Friendship Centre” originated in the mid-1950’s. A noticeable number of Aboriginal people were moving to the larger urban areas of Canada, primarily to seek an improved quality of life. In an effort to address the needs expressed by their communities, concerned individuals began to push for the establishment of specialized agencies.

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) was established in 1972 to represent the growing number of Friendship Centres, at the national level.

Currently, the NAFC represents the concerns of 99 core funded and 17 non-core funded Friendship Centres, as well as 7 Provincial and Territorial Associations (PTA’s), across Canada. The primary objectives are: to act as a central, unifying body for the Friendship Centre Movement; to promote and advocate the concerns of Aboriginal Peoples; and, to represent the needs of local Friendship Centres across the country to the federal government and to the public in general.

The NAFC also monitors the activities and programs of various federal government departments which have a mandate to provide either funding or services to urban Aboriginal people.

The NAFC further acts as a central communications body and facilitates external liaisons for both the Friendship Centres and the PTA’s. This function ensures that the membership has timely access to information which may impact on their operations.

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Why be concerned about hepatitis C?



1 Why be concerned about hepatitis C?

The hepatitis C virus is an infectious agent carried in the blood stream and affects the liver. It is estimated that 5,000 Canadians—mostly young people—get this virus each year. Hepatitis C is an infection that is increasing rapidly in Canada and around the world.

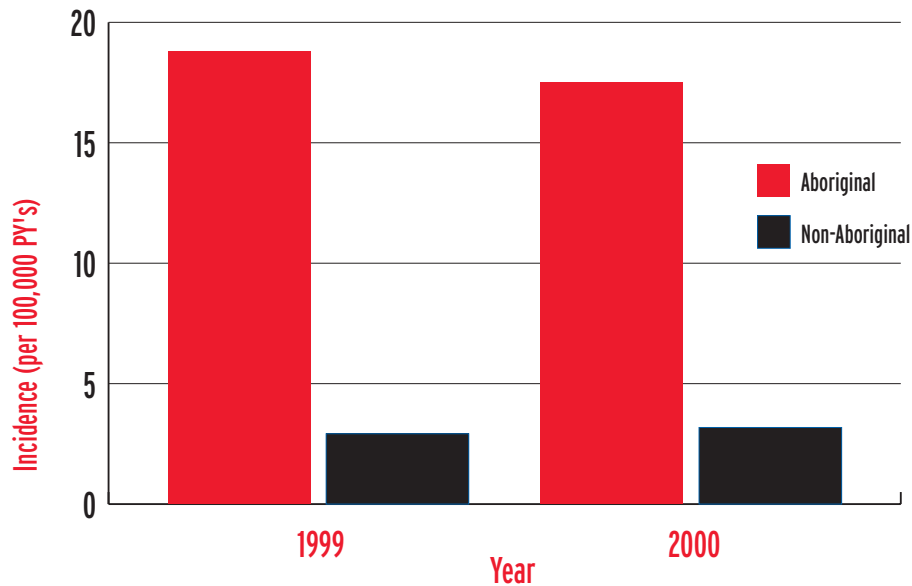
Between 210,000 and 275,000 people in Canada are infected with the virus. However, most people have not been tested and do not know they are infected. Many people with hepatitis C do not have symptoms of the disease for many years but they are still capable of spreading it to others.

Hepatitis C can affect a person for their whole life and cause permanent damage to the liver. A small number of people with hepatitis C may develop liver cancer.

WHAT IS HEPATITIS?

Hepatitis basically means inflammation of the liver. Inflammation is the body's response to irritation, injury, or infection. It causes pain, swelling, redness, and heat in the affected area. This can cause damage to liver cells. Hepatitis can be caused by drinking too much alcohol, by drugs, or by viruses.

Incidence of Acute Hepatitis C: Aboriginal vs. Non-Aboriginal Canadian-Born 1999-2000

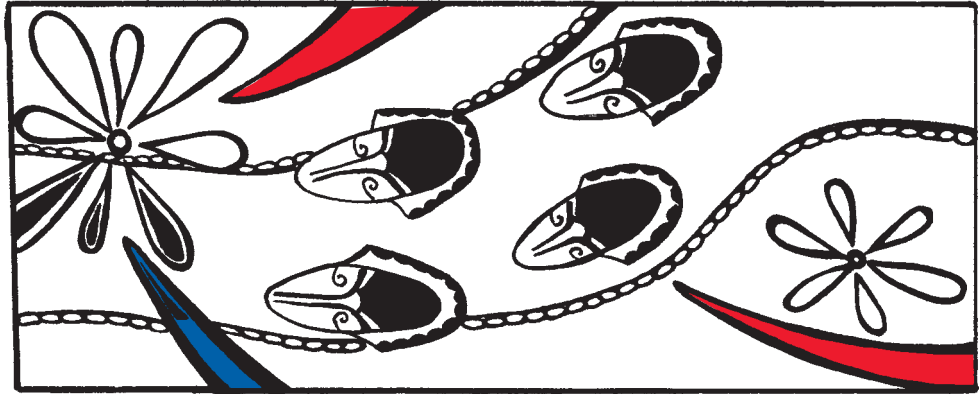


Incidence is defined as the number of new cases of disease, in a distinct population, within a specified period of time. An incidence rate is defined as the rate at which new infections occur in a defined population.

Chart Description

If we followed 100,000 Aboriginal and 100,000 Non-Aboriginal Canadian born persons over the course of the year 1999 we would have seen 18.8 new hepatitis C infections among Aboriginals compared to only 2.92 among Non-Aboriginals. For the year 2000, we would have seen 17.5 new infections for every 100,000 Aboriginal persons compared to 3.18 new infections for every 100,000 Non-Aboriginals followed. By taking the average of the two rates for each populations group and dividing them we see that the rate of new infection among Aboriginals is on average 7.5 times higher than that observed for Non-Aboriginals.

What is hepatitis C?



2 What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease. You are probably familiar with viruses that cause the common cold or stomach flu. The hepatitis C virus affects the liver. It can cause symptoms much like the cold virus will but in many cases, people have few or no symptoms at all for many years.

The hepatitis C virus is also called HCV for short.

WHERE DID HEPATITIS C COME FROM?

Nobody knows for sure how long hepatitis C has existed but we do know that it has been around for decades. This infection was originally called "non-A non-B hepatitis" because doctors knew it wasn't hepatitis A or hepatitis B but they knew it was a hepatitis virus. Doctors also noticed that some people who had received blood transfusions developed this non-A non-B hepatitis afterwards.

Then, in 1989, the hepatitis C virus was "discovered." Scientists were finally able to use modern technology to determine the virus responsible for non-A non-B hepatitis. This was an important discovery because once the virus was identified, tests could be developed to help detect the hepatitis C virus in people's blood.

World wide research continues and it is now known that the virus can mutate (change rapidly) and that there are several major sub-strains. These mutations and multiple number of strains are probably what help the virus avoid our body's immune defence system.

Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

3 Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

HCV is spread primarily through infected human blood. You are at risk of being infected with HCV if you:

- *Ever, even once, shared drug injection paraphernalia (needles, syringes, rigs) or drug preparation equipment (common syringes, spoons, cotton/rags, etc.);*
- *Ever, even once, shared snorting equipment (straws, blood contaminated surfaces, etc.);*
- *Received a blood transfusion or blood product (e.g., platelets, clotting factors) before 1990;*
- *Received an organ transplant from a HCV infected person;*
- *Had a tattoo or body part pierced with dirty or unsterile needles or ink;*
- *Have ever engaged in ritual piercing or cutting with shared tools;*
- *Have been on long-term kidney dialysis. It is possible to have shared supplies or equipment that had someone else's blood on it;*
- *Are a health care worker and have frequent contact with blood on the job, especially if you accidentally poke yourself with a needle (called a needlestick injury);*
- *Have a mother with hepatitis C at the time of your birth. Various studies suggest that HCV is spread to the child (of an infected mother) at a transmission rate of 5-10%;*
- *Had unprotected sex with a person infected with HCV. There is a small but possible risk;*
- *Have shared personal items that could have blood on them (razor, nail clippers, scissors, toothbrushes) with someone with hepatitis C infection; and,*
- *Received a medication injection or vaccine in a country where hepatitis C is common or where proper cleaning of medical equipment may not occur. Some countries with high numbers of Hep C infected people include: Egypt, Italy and Japan.*



WHO SHOULD BE TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C?

Anyone who has any of the risks just mentioned should be tested for HCV with a simple blood test. Your family doctor or the nurse at the health care centre can usually order this test for you.

The blood test is to test for anti-HCV and it basically shows if your body has ever been exposed to the virus. Most people who test positive for anti-HCV have a chronic hepatitis C infection, however, a few of those people will not have the virus in their blood anymore. If your anti-HCV test is positive, you will likely require further blood tests to help your doctor learn more about your hepatitis C status.

HAZARDS OF BODY PIERCING AND TATTOOING

As piercing and tattooing become more widespread, so do the risks for infections such as hepatitis C and skin infections. Piercing usually involves a needle being poked through the skin and then a piece of body jewellery being placed into the hole. Common jewellery includes studs, rings, and barbells. This jewellery is normally made of a metal that doesn't react with the body (e.g., gold, niobium, stainless steel). Piercings in the eyebrows, lips, tongue, nipples, nose, or genitalia are more likely to become infected. Ears are usually pierced with piercing guns. These guns cannot be sterilized and are only passably disinfected.

Tattoos are done by putting hundreds of small punctures into the skin and depositing a pigment (dye) to colour the skin. If tattoos are done using dirty or non-sterile needles, you can get hepatitis C or other infections including skin infections. If the ink that is used has been contaminated (dirtied) by a previously tattooed person, then you can become infected with hepatitis C. Tattoos done in prisons are often done under non-sterile conditions and can increase your risk for getting hepatitis C or other infections.



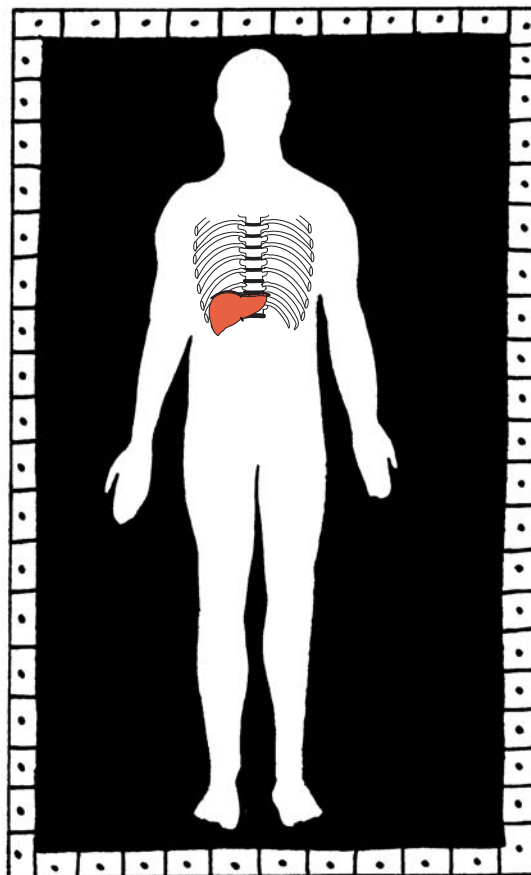
Why is the liver important?

4 Why is the liver important?

The liver is the largest organ inside the body. Located behind the lower ribs on the right side of the body, the liver is dark reddish brown in colour and weighs between 2.5 and 3.5 pounds in an adult. It has the consistency of foam rubber when healthy.

The liver has two main parts called the right and left lobes. There are over 300 billion specialized cells in the liver. These cells are served by a well-organized intricate system of bile ducts and blood vessels.

Hepatitis C affects the liver. The liver is a vital organ. Without it we would not be able to live. Apart from the brain, it is the most complex organ in the body.



If the liver is not functioning properly, your health will be affected. The liver has a number of important jobs to do in the body. It:

- *Stores iron, vitamins, and minerals;*
- *Clears the blood and body of harmful poisons and substances that we put into our body. The liver removes alcohol (beer, wine, spirits) and drugs (street drugs, prescribed medications, and over-the-counter medications) from our body or makes them less harmful to our body;*
- *Changes the food we eat into the energy and chemicals we need for life and growth;*
- *Helps us regulate the levels of blood sugar in our body;*
- *Makes new proteins that we use to build, repair, or run the various functions in our body;*
- *Makes clotting factors to help the blood clot;*
- *Helps remove poisons that enter our body through the air we breath (exhaust, smoke, chemicals); and,*
- *processes medications (metabolizes)*

If the liver is not functioning properly, your health will be affected.

The signs and symptoms of hepatitis C



5 The signs and symptoms of hepatitis C

Just as every person is unique, so is everybody's experience with hepatitis C. People infected with hepatitis C can be mildly affected with no symptoms or can have any of the symptoms listed below. Some of them can be disabling for the person.

Most people infected with hepatitis C have only a few mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. This is especially true in infants and young children. Other people can experience symptoms such as nausea and weakness that they may think are due to the "flu".

Some people may develop a pain in the right side, over the liver area. Their urine may become dark brown, and their feces may be pale. Some people may develop jaundice. Jaundice is when the skin and whites of the eyes become yellow-coloured.

Some of the symptoms of hepatitis C include:

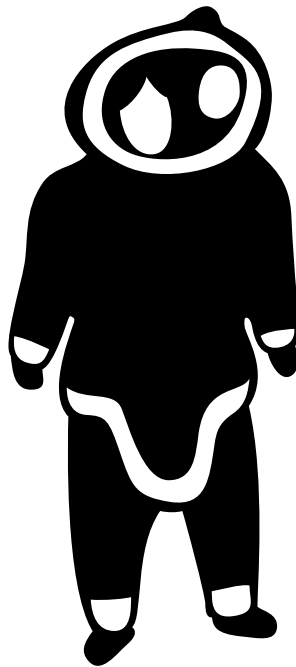
- *Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice);*
- *Fever;*
- *Tiredness (fatigue);*

Most people infected with hepatitis C have only a few mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

- *Loss of appetite;*
- *Abdominal pain;*
- *Urine that is dark in color;*
- *Vomiting;*
- *Feel sick in the stomach (nausea);*
- *Insomnia (inability to sleep);*
- *Pain in the joints;*
- *Headaches; and,*
- *Memory or concentration problems.*

Many people infected with hepatitis C have no symptoms and only find out they are infected when they have blood tests. These people can infect others without knowing it.

- *15% - 25% of acute HCV infection spontaneously resolve (75%-85% get chronic infection)*
- *3%-20% of people with chronic infection will develop cirrhosis in 20 years.*



How is the hepatitis C virus spread?



6 How is the hepatitis C virus spread?

The hepatitis C virus is in the blood of an infected person.

Hepatitis C can be spread by handling something with infected blood on it such as:

- *Razors, nail clippers or scissors;*
- *Toothbrushes and water pics;*
- *Tattoo or body piercing needles and tattoo ink;*
- *Injection drug needles;*
- *Straws used for snorting drugs;*
- *Spoons, or other drug preparation equipment; and,*
- *Tampons or sanitary napkins.*

HOW THE HEPATITIS C VIRUS IS NOT TRANSMITTED

People do not get the disease from day-to-day contact.

It is NOT spread by:

- *Sneezing;*
- *Coughing;*
- *Holding hands;*
- *Hugging;*
- *Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses; and,*
- *Food or water.*

People do not get the disease from day-to-day contact.

SEXUAL TRANSMISSION OF HEPATITIS C

This is an uncommon form of transmission. However, people with multiple sexual partners may be at greater risk and should use condoms to reduce the risk of acquiring or transmitting hepatitis C and to stop the spread of sexually transmitted infections like HIV or HBV. Remember, you can get hepatitis C when you are in contact with infected blood. During sexual activity, there are often small scrapes and scratches that occur – often too small to notice. This is a potential way to come in contact with infected blood.

People that have obvious sores, blisters and open cuts in the genital area (groin) or mouth or anus should be careful if they have genital, oral, or anal sex.

To avoid blood contact and prevent the infection from spreading, it is important to use condoms or avoid having sex when a woman is having her menstrual period.

When one partner is hepatitis C positive, couples need to reassess their sexual practices to avoid the risk of blood to blood contact during sex.

The risk of one partner with hepatitis C infection passing it on to their long-term sexual partner is low but not absent.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Exposure to HCV is possible in any occupation in which there is exposure to blood. For example, nurses, emergency medical technicians, doctors, and other health care workers may come in contact with infected blood at accident scenes, in operating rooms and clinics, and during the course of their normal work (e.g., taking blood for lab tests). Health care workers come in contact with blood if they accidentally get poked with a needle at work. This is called a needle stick injury.

Health care workers that help clients with toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers may be exposed to blood.

Health care workers should wear gloves whenever they could be exposed to blood. They should also learn proper care and disposal of sharp items such as blades and needles to minimize the exposure to blood.

BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS AND ORGAN DONATION

In Canada, the blood supply is screened with special tests to ensure that no blood contaminated with hepatitis C is given to anyone. The risk of getting hepatitis C from a blood transfusion is less than 1 in 500,000 donations.

The blood supply in Canada wasn't always as safe. Before 1992, tests to screen blood for HCV were not as sensitive as today. People who received a blood transfusion before 1992 should have their blood tested for HCV.

NO RISK FACTORS

Tears, saliva, urine, and other body fluids

- HCV cannot be passed by body fluids unless there is blood present

Mosquitos

- There is no evidence that you can get hepatitis C through a mosquito bite

Animal bites

- There is no evidence that you can get hepatitis C through an animal bite

Human bites

- Nobody has ever reported getting hepatitis C through a human bite

Treatment

7 Treatment

At the present time, there is a vaccine for hepatitis A and hepatitis B, but not for hepatitis C. A vaccine is made by taking a killed virus or attenuated live virus or part of a virus and injecting it into the body. The body is tricked into thinking it is being invaded by a live virus and creates antibodies and fighting cells to protect itself. These antibodies and fighting cells protect the body from future exposures to the virus.



Not everybody needs to be treated for their hepatitis C. Remember, many people with HCV don't have any symptoms of hepatitis C and many don't develop complications related to their hepatitis C for decades. A physician who deals with hepatitis C will be able to help sort out whether or not you need to be treated.

There are several things you can do on your own to improve the health of your liver.

You could:

- *Stop drinking alcohol (this is the most important thing you can do);*
- *Stop smoking;*
- *Find effective ways to cope with stress;*
- *Exercise regularly;*
- *Eat a healthy balanced diet; and,*
- *Rest. Get a good night's sleep.*

There are several treatments available for hepatitis C. Treatments are constantly changing for hepatitis C as new research is done. Currently the most often recommended medical treatment for hepatitis C is a combination therapy of two medications: interferon and ribavirin.

To understand how these medications work, you need to understand the basics of the hepatitis C virus infection.

Think of the liver as being built of thousands of tiny building blocks called cells. Each cell does the work of the liver. Each hepatitis C virus infects one of these cells. Once in the cell, HCV starts to copy itself and make more HCV that is released to infect more liver cells. Another way to think of the HCV infection is to pretend that the HCV infects the individual cell and sets up a photocopier machine. The HCV turns the photocopier on and starts to make copies of itself.

Treatment targets two main actions. Interferon turns off the photocopier and ribavirin destroys the photocopies.

Interferon is a natural protein that our body makes to fight off infections. The manufactured interferon comes in two types of preparations and both need to be injected under the skin. The traditional interferon preparation must be injected under the skin three times per week to be most effective. A newer type of interferon, called pegylated interferon, has been modified to last longer in the body. Pegylated interferon only needs to be injected once per week.

Ribavirin is a virus-fighting drug. Ribavirin is taken by mouth twice a day to be most effective. Either medication alone can fight hepatitis C but in combination, they help each other to be more powerful killers of HCV.

The combination treatment for hepatitis C may last 6 or 12 months. Common side effects of the medications can occur. Frequently reported side effects include: flu-like symptoms – fever, chills, tiredness, muscle and joint aches, depression, and some hair loss. Side effects may become milder as your body gradually develops a natural tolerance to the drug. Depression and mood swings can worsen and need to be monitored closely during treatment.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINES

The Medicine Wheel

The medicine wheel is an ancient and powerful symbol used by almost all the Native people in North America. It is a silent teacher about reality. It reminds us that human beings have four aspects to their nature; the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. Each of these areas must be developed equally in a healthy, well balanced person through the use of our will power.

The medicine wheel also reminds us that being well balanced is more than just physical. The spiritual, emotional and mental well-being of a person can affect the way the person feels.

The medicine wheel is a symbolic tool that helps us to see that we are connected with the rest of creation.

Sweetgrass, sage, cedar and tobacco

Sweetgrass, sage, cedar and tobacco encompass the four sacred plants. Burning these is a sign of deep spirituality in Native practices. Cedar and sage are burned to drive out negative forces when prayer is offered. Sweetgrass, which signifies kindness, is burned to invite good spirits to enter. Participants also use these purification rituals to smudge drums and other articles before taking part in ceremonies.

When used properly in small amounts in traditional ceremonies, tobacco can be a positive source of energy.

All of these spiritual and cultural practices may help a person feel better.

ALCOHOL AND HEPATITIS C

Alcohol is poison to the liver. If hepatitis C infection was a slow burning fire in the liver, then alcohol would be like adding gasoline to the fire. Drinking alcohol causes the damage of hepatitis C to occur much faster. In some cases, the damage to the liver can lead to cirrhosis, a scarred liver that doesn't function very well. People with cirrhosis are also more likely to develop liver cancer.

Heavy drinkers are not the only people at risk for liver disease, as damage can occur in even some moderate "social drinkers" and in people who prefer to "binge" only on weekends or occasions.

People with hepatitis C should avoid drinking alcohol.

If you find the goal of quitting drinking "cold turkey" too daunting, the following suggestions may be useful:

- *Avoid binge drinking;*
- *Try low-alcohol drinks;*
- *Alternate non-alcoholic drinks with alcoholic drinks;*
- *Avoid places where you may be "pressured" or expected to drink heavily; and,*
- *Finish each drink before the next, keeping track of how many you have had.*

You may also find it easier to quit drinking if you have support. One common and proven support is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Meetings are held in nearly every populated centre in Canada. Look in your local phonebook for a meeting near you. Most provinces have an alcohol or addictions foundation that can lead you to resources available in your area.

Alcohol is
a potent
toxin to
the liver.

MEDICATIONS

Some prescribed herbal/natural remedies and over-the-counter medications can be harmful to a damaged liver if directions are not followed. Many medications may seriously damage the liver when taken in high doses for too long. It is therefore important to consult a doctor or pharmacist about your current medications, or any proposed medications, and follow the directions. If you have serious liver disease (e.g., cirrhosis) it is best to avoid tylenol and to consult your doctor about all medications.

Most medications pass through the liver in order to be broken down by the body. The following common medications can affect the liver and should only be used after discussion with your physician:

Tylenol (acetaminophen)	Allopurinol (gout treatment)
Aspirin	Steroids
Anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs)	Birth control pills
Some high cholesterol treatments	Diabetes medications
Dilantin (phenytoin)	Vitamin A
Certain antidepressant medications	Some antibiotics

HERBS AND VITAMINS

There are many herbs and vitamin treatments being touted as cures for hepatitis C. Unfortunately there have been no remarkable studies on the use of any herbs or vitamins in the treatment of hepatitis C. However, there are some herbal products that have caused liver damage in the past and should be avoided if you have hepatitis C.

The herbal products that have caused toxic hepatitis in the past are:

Alchemilla (Lady's mantle)	Asafetida
Chaparral	Some Chinese herbs (ma-huang)
Comfrey (symphitum)	Crotalaria
Gentian	Germander
Heliotropium	Hops
Mistletoe	Senna
Shark cartilage	Skullcap (scutellaria)
Valerian	Vitamin A

CIRRHOSIS

Many chronic liver diseases are associated with malnutrition. One of the most common of these is cirrhosis. Cirrhosis is essentially a scarred liver. As the liver is damaged by infection and inflammation it repairs itself by creating a scar. As more damage occurs, more scar tissue replaces the normal liver tissue. Unfortunately, scar tissue cannot do the job that the normal liver does and this leads to a poorly functioning liver.

Cirrhosis can occur for many reasons. For example; heavy alcohol drinking, bile duct blockage in the liver, or toxic exposure to some drugs and substances can lead to cirrhosis. People with cirrhosis often experience loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and weight loss, giving them a wasted-away appearance. Diet alone does not contribute to the development of this liver disease. People who are well nourished, for example, but drink large amounts of alcohol, are also susceptible to liver disease.

INJECTION DRUG USE AND HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C has emerged as the most serious health problem for people who inject drugs. The majority of people who have injected drugs have hepatitis C so those users who do not yet have hepatitis C are at great risk of infection. Studies have shown that 90% (9 out of 10) of persons who inject drugs have hepatitis C after five years of injecting drugs. More shocking is that over half of the injection drug users get HCV within the first year of injecting drugs.

The majority of people who have shared equipment to inject drugs have hepatitis C. Even those people who have shared injecting equipment once or twice have possibly caught the virus. It does not matter what is injected –heroin, methadone, pills, speed or steroids– it is how the drugs are injected that is a potential risk for transmitting infection. Simply sharing a container with a liquid drug preparation which several people use together to fill syringes is sufficient blood-to-blood contact to spread the hepatitis C virus. Someone who already has hepatitis C is at risk of re-infection with another strain of hepatitis C, or other viral infections like HIV (AIDS) or hepatitis B.

As for anyone with hepatitis C, people who inject drugs need adequate medical follow-up after a hepatitis C diagnosis is made. Awareness of infection is important, as is knowledge of safe injecting practices and recommended lifestyle changes.



Hepatitis C and women and children



8 Hepatitis C and women and children

DOES HEPATITIS C AFFECT WOMEN DIFFERENTLY?

Women can be affected by hepatitis C in a different way from men. Hormonal effects of hepatitis C can involve menstrual irregularities, lower sex drive and severe premenstrual syndrome, particularly if the woman is experiencing significant hepatitis C symptoms. It is important that the woman's general health is checked as well as having her hepatitis C monitored.

Women can be affected by hepatitis C in a different way from men.

BIRTH CONTROL

Most birth control pills have estrogen in them. Estrogen is a female hormone produced by the ovaries. When women with hepatitis C have severe symptoms of their disease they are sometimes advised to not take estrogen-based birth control pills.

BREAST FEEDING

In scientific studies, hepatitis C has rarely been found in the breast milk of mothers with hepatitis C. The transmission of hepatitis C in breast milk is therefore very unlikely. Ultimately the choice to breast feed or bottle feed is up to the parents.

Remember, HCV is in the blood. If you have hepatitis C and bleeding nipples, sores, or infections near the nipples this could pose a risk to the feeding infant, and you should not breast feed.

PASSING HEPATITIS C TO YOUR NEWBORN CHILD

Studies suggest that rates of transmission of hepatitis C from mother to newborn infant is 5%-10%. If a pregnant woman has both hepatitis C and HIV at the same time, the chance of her child getting HCV is about three times higher. If a woman becomes newly infected with hepatitis C during her pregnancy, the risk of transmitting HCV to the baby is higher.

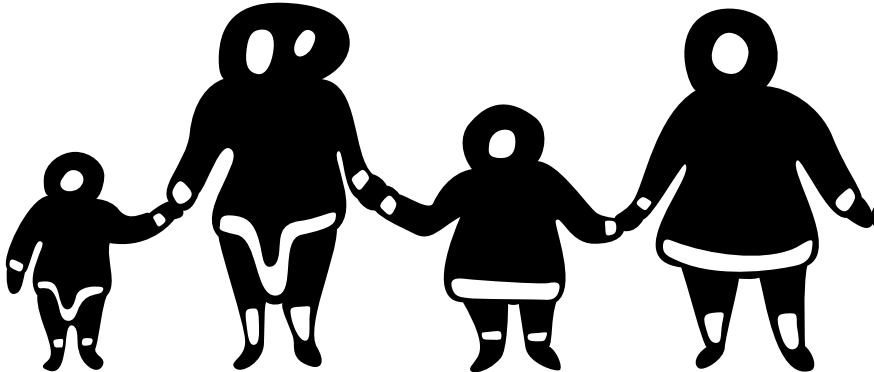
WHAT DOES HEPATITIS C MEAN FOR KIDS?

Children seem to be affected differently than adults.

Some studies on children who have been infected at birth with hepatitis C have shown that 30-50% of children clear the virus on their own (meaning they fight it off successfully). This means that fewer children with HCV go on to develop a chronic HCV infection (as compared to adults). Children rarely get severe liver disease as a result of hepatitis C infection.

Children seem to be affected differently than adults.

Children who have hepatitis C usually report no symptoms at all and if they do have symptoms they are most often mild. Some of the symptoms reported by kids include fatigue and abdominal pain.



Prevention of hepatitis C

9 Prevention of hepatitis C

Presently, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C. The goal for everybody should be to prevent individuals from acquiring or transmitting the infection to others.

People who have hepatitis C should remain aware that their blood and possibly other body fluids are potentially infective, even when the person carrying the virus is not showing any symptoms.



HOW CAN THE SPREAD OF HEPATITIS C BE PREVENTED?

Avoid blood exposure to yourself or others by NOT sharing needles, drug preparation equipment, or drug use equipment. DO NOT share toothbrushes, razors, clippers, or other personal hygiene equipment that may have blood on them.

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE WHO HAVE HEPATITIS C DO?

Anyone who has hepatitis C should:

- *Not donate blood, plasma, body organs, sperm, or other body tissues;*
- *Not share toothbrushes, razors, or other items that could become contaminated with blood;*
- *Discuss your condition with your health care provider when undergoing any medical or dental procedure;*
- *Wipe up any blood spills carefully and personally;*
- *Cover open sores or other breaks in your skin; and,*
- *Never share injecting equipment (needles) nor snorting equipment (straws).*

HCV may be spread by sexual contact with an infected person. To reduce the chances of acquiring or transmitting HCV by sexual contact, follow these guidelines:

- *Use latex condoms to prevent the exchange of body fluids;*
- *Have only one sex partner;*
- *If you have multiple sex partners, reduce the number of your sex partners;*
- *Inform your sex partners about your illness. Discuss your condition with your sex partner;*
- *Use lubricant when engaging in anal or genital sex to reduce the friction and potentially reduce the chance of getting tears or scrapes in the vagina, anus, or on the penis; and,*
- *Water-based lubricants (e.g., KY Jelly) are safe to use with condoms.*





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Where to find more information

The following organizations are able to provide additional information and answer questions you may have.

Canadian Liver Foundation

National Office: Suite 1500,
2235 Sheppard Avenue East,
Toronto, ON M2J 5B5
Toll Free: 1-800-563-5483
Web: www.liver.ca

Canadian Hemophilia Society

National Office: 625 President Kennedy Avenue,
Suite 1210,
Montreal, QC H3A 1K2
Toll Free: 1-800-668-2686
Web: www.hemophilia.ca

Hepatitis C Society of Canada

National Office: 3050 Confederation Parkway,
Unit #301B,
Mississauga, ON L5B 3Z6
Toll Free: 1-800-652-HepC (4372)
Web: www.hepatitiscsociety.com

Health Canada

Hepatitis C Division:
Centre for Infection Disease Prevention and Control
Population and Public Health Branch, Health Canada
400 Cooper Street, Postal Locator 4602A,
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9
Fax: 613-941-9831
Web: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/hepatitis_c

Glossary

11 Glossary

The following defines some of the more commonly used terms for the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The information here is general in nature and serves as an introduction to the language surrounding HCV. Please note that not all the terms described in this glossary are used in this manual.



ACUTE A term used to describe a condition that occurs suddenly or that runs for only a short time. It is the opposite of “chronic”.

ANTIBODY A protein made by our immune system in response to infection. Antibodies are “fighting molecules” in our body that help protect the body from invaders such as bacteria and viruses. The presence of antibodies in the blood does not necessarily mean that a virus will be killed and eliminated from the body.

ANTIGEN Anything foreign to the body that enters the body and is recognized by the immune system is called an antigen. An antigen stimulates the immune system to produce “fighter molecules” called antibodies or “fighting cells”, to attack the foreign substance (e.g., virus or bacteria).

ASYMPTOMATIC Having no symptoms.

BILE Bitter-tasting fluid produced by the liver and temporarily stored in the gallbladder before being released into the small intestines. In the small bowel, bile helps to digest fats.

BLOOD AND BLOOD PRODUCTS Refers to all components of blood including red cells, white cells, platelets, and plasma. Plasma is the fluid that carries blood and can be separated by special techniques by blood banks.

CARRIER Practically all people who are HCV antibody positive “carry” the virus. The term “carrier” is often misused, though, to mean someone who has the hepatitis C virus yet is in good health. In regard to hepatitis C, the term “carrier” is used less often. Better definitions of illness status include antibody positive or antibody negative; symptomatic or asymptomatic. Most important to note is that all people who are hepatitis C antibody positive need to be aware of the potential for passing on the virus.

CHOLESTEROL Fatty substance made in the liver and found in the blood, brain, liver, and bile, and as deposits in the walls of blood vessels.

CHRONIC ACTIVE HEPATITIS Any form of liver inflammation lasting more than six months and causing continuing damage to liver cells. It sometimes precedes cirrhosis.

CIRRHOSIS A condition where scar tissue develops in the liver to the extent where such scarring becomes extensive and permanent. Cirrhosis interferes with the normal functioning of the liver.

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) The genetic material which determines a cell’s activities. It carries the cell’s genetic code.

EPIDEMIOLOGY The study of patterns of disease in a population.

FIBROSIS Scar formation resulting from the repair of tissue damage. If it occurs extensively in the liver, it is called cirrhosis.

GAMMA GLOBULIN A protein found in the blood that helps fight infections.

GASTROENTEROLOGY A branch of medicine specializing in diseases of the liver, stomach, intestines and oesophagus etc.

GENOTYPE A virus strain with a distinct genetic makeup.

HEMOPHILIA A hereditary blood disease found almost only in males, where the blood fails to clot and abnormal bleeding occurs.

HEMODIALYSIS Procedure used in toxic conditions and renal (kidney) failure, in which wastes and impurities are removed from the blood by a special machine.

HEPATIC Pertaining to the liver.

HEPATOCELLULAR CARCINOMA Cancer of the liver. A malignant tumour arising in the liver. In most cases, it occurs as a complication following cirrhosis.

HEPATOLOGIST A liver specialist.

HCV Hepatitis C virus

INCIDENCE The number of new infections that occurs in a given period of time.

IMMUNITY State of being resistant to a disease (especially an infectious one).

IMMUNIZATION Introduction of antigens into the body in very small amounts in order to stimulate the development of immunity.

IMMUNOGLOBULIN A protein that can act as an antibody.

INFECTION A condition in which the body is invaded by a microorganism, such as a virus.

INFLAMMATION A tissue's reaction to injury from infection or irritation, causing swelling, pain, heat, and redness.

JAUNDICE Yellowing of the skin and eyes due to higher-than-normal levels of bilirubin in the blood. Bilirubin is an orange-yellow pigment in bile.

LIVER Largest internal organ in the body, and the site of many metabolic functions. These include producing bile, neutralizing poisons, synthesizing proteins, and storing glycogen and certain minerals and vitamins.

MUTATE When cells divide or viruses multiply, their genetic material must be copied. Sometimes mistakes are made when this happens and the resulting new cell or virus is different in some way. This is important for viruses because mutation can fool the immune system into not recognizing the virus.

NON-A NON-B HEPATITIS The old term for hepatitis C shown not to be caused by the A & B viruses. In 1988, this form of hepatitis was shown to be mainly caused by HCV.

PATHOGEN Any organism or substance capable of producing a disease.

PREVALENCE In regard to hepatitis C, prevalence relates to the number of cases in the community at any one time. It is usually expressed as a percentage or ratio. eg. 1% of the population, or 1 in 100 people.

RELAPSE Recurrence of disease or symptoms after apparent recovery.

REMISSION Abatement of absence of symptoms where symptoms were present before.

SPLEEN The organ located to the left and just in front of the stomach that stores and sometimes manufactures blood cells.

VIRAL LOAD A measure of the amount of virus present in a person's blood stream.

VIRUS Tiny organism that causes disease.



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