

The hepatitis C virus is a blood-borne disease that attacks the liver. In 85% of all cases, the infection will last a lifetime. This puts a person at risk for developing cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, and even death.

Hepatitis C kills 8,000-10,000 Americans each year. Many people don't know they are infected because there are no symptoms at first. However, hepatitis C can slowly progress to cirrhosis over many years. Unfortunately, most of the 4 million Americans infected have not been diagnosed, and thus do not know that they have hepatitis C.

The major types of hepatitis are hepatitis A, B, and C. Safe and effective vaccines exist for hepatitis A and B, but there is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C. Fortunately, new treatments for hepatitis C that succeed in many patients do exist. Research is continuing to find improved treatments for the years ahead.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

Hepatitis C is a virus that is spread by infected blood. Many ways of getting infected have been identified. Combat and even military training often bring soldiers into contact with blood. Exposures to bleeding wounds or transfusions are ways you may become infected. Tattoos, sexual contact, or injection or snorting of drugs are other possible risks.

Please take this easy quiz. It will help to tell if you may have been exposed to the hepatitis C virus. It is vital that you be honest with yourself in answering these questions. Even if you can't remember, or are in doubt, PLEASE GET TESTED.

ARE YOU AT RISK FOR HEPATITIS C?

1. In your military service, have you ever been in a situation in which you have had exposure to someone else's blood through contact with a bleeding wound, through needlestick injury, or in any other way?
2. Did you serve in Vietnam?
3. Did you have a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992?
4. Have you ever, EVEN ONCE, injected drugs?
5. Have you ever, EVEN ONCE, snorted or inhaled cocaine using a straw or bill?
6. Have you ever had unprotected sex with multiple partners? Do you have a history of sexually transmitted disease?
7. Have you ever had a tattoo or part of your body pierced?
8. Have you ever had acupuncture?
9. Have you ever had hemodialysis?
10. Were you born to an HCV-infected mother?
11. Have you received, before 1987, blood products for clotting problems?
12. Have you ever had an abnormal liver function test?

If you answer YES to any of the questions, you need to get a simple blood test for hepatitis C. Visit your VA medical center or doctor immediately.

PLANNING YOUR ATTACK IF YOU'RE INFECTED

If your blood test shows that you have hepatitis C, your doctor may recommend further testing, possibly including a liver biopsy. A biopsy shows how much damage (if any) the hepatitis C virus has done. Based on these results, your doctor will discuss treatment options that are increasingly effective.

If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C, it is important that you DO NOT drink alcoholic beverages. Research has shown that alcohol speeds up the advance of liver disease. It is also important that you get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B. These diseases are even more dangerous for someone with hepatitis C.

If you have hepatitis C, there are other things you can do for your health. There are also important things you can do to help prevent spreading hepatitis C to your loved ones and other individuals. Ask your doctor for more information on these topics. The sooner you know if you are infected, the sooner you can take steps to safeguard your health.

You protected your country. Now protect yourself if you have hepatitis C. If you have any questions, or want more information about hepatitis C, contact your health care professional, your VA medical center, or the American Liver Foundation.

*Studies show the risk of getting hepatitis C through unprotected sex is low, if you don't have multiple sex partners or you don't have a sexually transmitted disease. You can't get or give hepatitis C through everyday contact like hugging or kissing.

ASSESSING
YOUR
RISKS

ASSESSING
THE
ENEMY

The American Liver Foundation is a national voluntary health organization dedicated to the prevention, treatment, and cure of hepatitis and other liver diseases, through research, education, and advocacy.

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Hepatitis C Centers of Excellence
<http://www.va.gov/hepatitisc/>

Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis

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Supported by an unrestricted educational grant from Schering Oncology/Biotech.

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HEPATITIS C

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