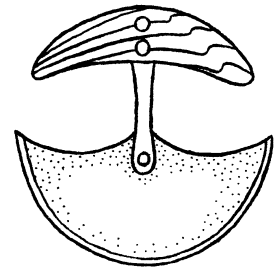


Information for Inuit Community Members

Fact Sheet 4 HIV/AIDS -Related Illnesses



HIV AND HCV (CO-INFECTION)

What is HIV?

HIV stands for the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus, the virus that causes AIDS.

What is HCV?

HCV stands for the Hepatitis C Virus, the virus that causes Hepatitis C.

What is HIV/HCV co-infection?

Co-infection is a medical term meaning that you have two or more infections in your body at the same time. If you have HIV/HCV co-infection, then you have both HIV and HCV. These two viruses, and the conditions they cause, are very different, so it is important that you learn about both of them.

I already know about HCV. What do I need to learn about HIV?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It is spread mainly through the blood and through sexual contact. You can have HIV and feel perfectly healthy. Over many years, however, the virus can wear down your body's immune system, exposing you to dangerous infections. Having HIV can also increase your risk of getting certain cancers. There are many treatments now that can help people with HIV. As a result, people with HIV are living much longer and healthier lives than before. Even so, HIV infection is dangerous. You will want to learn much more about it so that you can do everything possible to stay healthy. You will also need to learn how to avoid giving HIV to others.

I already know about HIV. What do I need to learn about Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease of your liver. It is caused by infection with HCV. HCV is mainly spread through the blood. The symptoms of HCV infection are usually very mild. In fact, you may not have any symptoms at all. Some people with HCV feel very tired or sick to their stomach. Even though HCV might not make you feel sick, it is still a serious illness. In most cases, if you have HCV, it never goes away. Over time, it can lead to other problems, including cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer and, because it stays in your body, you can give HCV to someone else.

Can having HIV make HCV worse?

Yes. HIV affects your whole immune system, including your body's ability to fight HCV. As a result, you might develop a worse case of HCV than someone who doesn't have HIV.

What do I need to know about HIV, HCV and sex?

HIV is spread by infected blood, semen and vaginal fluids. HCV is spread mainly by the blood and rarely by sex. Practising safer sex is the best way to keep other people from getting HIV. HCV isn't spread through unprotected sex as easily as HIV, but it is possible, especially if there is blood involved. If you have sex, the best thing to do is to practice safer sex all the time. By practicing safer sex, you can do everything possible to avoid giving HIV or HCV to anyone.

To practice safer sex, always:

- ◆ Use a condom, dental dam or other latex barrier.
- ◆ Avoid "rough sex" or other activities that might draw blood.

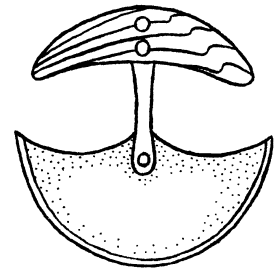
What do I need to know about HIV, HCV and drug use?

Sharing needles or injecting equipment is one of the easiest ways to spread HCV and HIV. By sharing needles, you can actually spread both of these viruses at the same time. The best thing to do, especially if you have HCV or HIV or both, is to never use drugs. If you do use drugs, make sure that your needle and injecting equipment are clean (brand new) every time, and never share them with anyone else. Ask your doctor if you need help getting off drugs.



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Is there a cure for HIV and/or HCV?

No, there are no cures for HIV or HCV infection however there are a growing number of treatments. Talk with your doctor about getting treated for HIV and HCV. Educate yourself about your treatment options as much as you can.

What can I do to slow down my HIV and HCV co-infection?

The best way to keep your co-infection from becoming a real problem is to keep yourself and your liver as healthy as you can.

Respect the following guidelines:

- ◆ DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL. Alcohol weakens your immune system and damages your liver even when you are healthy. Drinking alcohol when you have HIV and HCV makes the damage much worse. Remember, there is no "safe" amount of alcohol you can drink when you have HIV and HCV. Nor does it make any difference if you switch from "hard" liquor to beer, cider or wine. If you think that it might be difficult for you to stop drinking alcohol, talk to your doctor.
- ◆ Get vaccinated against other Hepatitis viruses. Having one form of Hepatitis doesn't mean that you can't get any of the others. Talk to your doctor about getting shots to protect you from getting Hepatitis A and B.
- ◆ Avoid taking medicines, supplements, natural or herbal remedies that might cause damage to your liver. Even ordinary pain relievers can cause liver problems in some people. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you take any natural or herbal remedy, supplement, prescription or over the counter medicine. Make sure your doctor knows about all the medicines you are taking for your HIV.

Will having HCV prevent me from getting treated for HIV?

No, however some HIV treatments can damage your liver, so your doctor may want you to try others.

Will having HIV prevent me from getting treated for HCV?

No, however if you have HIV, you might experience worse side effects or other problems when you take medicines for HCV.

What are some other things I can do?

Having HIV or HCV alone is difficult enough. Finding out that you have both at the same time might seem overwhelming.

Here are some things that can help:

- ◆ Respect your body. Eat healthy food, drink plenty of water and get restful sleep. Try to exercise every day. Take a walk, for example, or lift light weights.
- ◆ Don't use drugs, drink alcohol or have unprotected sex. Remember that drugs and alcohol can make your condition worse. Having unprotected sex can give HIV and/or HCV to others. Talk with your doctor if you can't stop drinking, taking drugs or having unprotected sex.
- ◆ Get support. Ask your doctor where you can get support in your area. If you already receive services from an AIDS organization, ask about support groups for people who have HIV and HCV.
- ◆ Stay informed. HIV and HCV are two of the most important medical issues today. Try to educate yourself about them. Ask your doctor if you need help making sense of anything you hear or see in the media (radio, TV, newspaper) about HIV and HCV.
- ◆ Follow your doctor's advice. Follow any other instructions you get from your doctor. Try to keep all of your appointments. Call your doctor immediately if you have a problem.

