

How You May Have Caught the Virus

The hepatitis C virus is contracted or spread through “**blood to blood**” contact. This means that you probably became infected by coming in contact with blood that has the hepatitis C virus in it.



Additional Information

This **Six Pamphlet Series**, along with the **Resource Directory**, is designed to provide you with a list of people in your community who can help give you a better understanding of Hepatitis C, such as: how to prevent its spread, treatment choices available and ways to take control of your life through healthy lifestyle choices.

- **See** the Manitoba Hepatitis C Resource Directory for a glossary of terms and definitions and HCV resource contacts within the community.
- **Read** the entire Six Pamphlet Series on Hepatitis C.
- **Contact** the Manitoba Hepatitis C Support Community by telephone at: 779-6464, email: info@mbhepc.org or through our website: www.mbhepc.org

Hepatitis C Infection & Prevention

Pamphlet # **3**
in a 6 Pamphlet Series
On Hepatitis C

- **How You May Have Caught the Virus**
- **Preventing the Spread of the Hepatitis C Virus**



How You May Have Caught the Virus

You may never discover how hepatitis C got into your bloodstream, as there are many ways in which this can happen. Some of these ways are:

High Risk

- Using or sharing drug injection tools, such as needles and syringes.
- Using straws or pipes for cocaine or other drugs that are snorted or smoked
- Any person who received a blood transfusion, blood products, organ or tissue transplants before 1990.
- Accidentally pricking or jabbing yourself with a used needle from a person with the virus. Each needle prick carries a 1% to 2% chance of catching the virus.
- Hemodialysis: People with kidney failure and complications from diabetes and heart disease need hemodialysis to clean their blood. This removes extra fluids and wastes from their blood and returns clean blood to their bodies. It is estimated that 10% of these people will get HCV infection every year as more blood products are used.

Lower Risk

- Sharing house-hold items such as razors, nail files & toothbrushes that may have blood on them.
- Having any kind of skin piercing that may use infected tools. This would include: tattooing, acupuncture, electrolysis and body and ear piercing.
- Sexual activities. Open sores, or STD's such as herpes and HIV greatly increase the danger.
- Unprotected sex with a partner infected with HCV has a less than 5% lifetime risk of infection. Women who have HCV should definitely avoid unprotected sex during their period.

Preventing the Spread of HCV

Once you know that you are infected with HCV, it is up to you to be careful to protect your family, friends, co-workers, or anyone else who may come in contact with your blood. The best way to stop the spread of HCV is to know about it. Knowing the different ways in which HCV can be spread from person to person will help you to take the care to prevent passing on the infection. Here are some steps to take to reduce the risk of others being infected:

Do not share drug equipment for snorting, smoking or injecting. There are safe crack kits and needle exchange programs available to lessen this risk.

Do not share any personal things that could contain small amounts of blood.

Avoid skin piercing procedures

Bandage or cover all cuts and sores until healed.

Put all dirty things stained with your blood such as bandages, paper tissues, tampons or razors into a plastic bag, before putting them into the garbage.

Blood-stained sheets, towels, linen and clothes should first be washed with bleach (Javax) using a cold wash, then by a hot wash.

You **must not** give blood.

Tell your sex partner(s) you have HCV.

Use a latex condom when having sex, especially when having sex with a woman who is having her period.

Talk to your doctor if you are thinking about having a baby.

If you are on medication for HCV, or are a hemophiliac on a home infusion program, carefully place your used needles and syringes into the disposal container given to you by the clinic.

Avoid donating semen (sperm), body tissues or an organ.

Clean up all blood spills with soap and hot water and disinfect the area with a 10% solution of bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water). If other are cleaning up make sure they are wearing gloves. **Note: Current research indicates that HCV may survive anywhere from a few minutes and up to 7 days on a dry or wet surface.**

You can be immunized for Hepatitis A and B, but there is currently no immunization available for Hepatitis C.