

Why are Aboriginal people at risk for infection with hepatitis C virus?

- Nomadic lifestyle
- Residential school syndrome
- Loss of culture and spirituality
- Language and literacy issues
- Loss of traditional parenting skills
- Breakdown of the family
- Unhealthy foster care
- Sexual abuse
- Low self esteem
- Isolation
- Lack of awareness
- Alcohol abuse
- IV drug use
- Time in prison
- Tattooing
- Poor access to health services



The Grieving Mask represents the sense of sorrow many people feel over the circumstances that have put Aboriginal people at high risk.

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What does a healthy liver do?

- The liver makes nutrients from the foods you eat
- The liver helps the body clear out harmful things such as drugs and alcohol
- The liver makes the things that make your blood clot when you are bleeding (clotting factors)
- The liver makes hormones for your body
- The liver makes sure that your body remains healthy
- A healthy liver is necessary for a healthy life.
Respect your liver.



The Healing House: a traditional coastal longhouse. The serpents on the front represents "cleansing" in some First Nations cultures. The serpents can also represent, here, the Caduceus, the symbol of western medicine.

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What is Hepatitis C Virus?

- Hepatitis C virus is a virus that is spread by blood-to-blood contact with someone who has the virus in their blood
- A virus is a very small living thing that invades cells and damages them
- Hepatitis C virus can attack the liver and cause a disease of the liver known as hepatitis C
- Hepatitis = “hepat” (liver) + “itis” (inflammation) = inflammation of the liver
- Hepatitis C is spreading quickly among our Aboriginal people, especially among drug users who share needles

**There is effective treatment and many people get better after treatment.
There is no vaccine.**



The hepatitis C ribbon represents our dedication to the memory of those who have passed and our commitment to the struggle to defeat this disease.

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Some facts about Hepatitis C

- Hepatitis C is this country's most common blood-borne disease, infecting at least 1 out of every 100 people.
- Hepatitis C affects each person differently.
- About 300,000 people in Canada and 40,000 people in British Columbia are infected with the hepatitis C virus right now and that number is growing
- Some of our Aboriginal people may have the virus and not even know
- Some of our people who are infected with hepatitis C may be infected with other viruses too, such as HIV/AIDS or hepatitis B. The term for this is "co-infection"



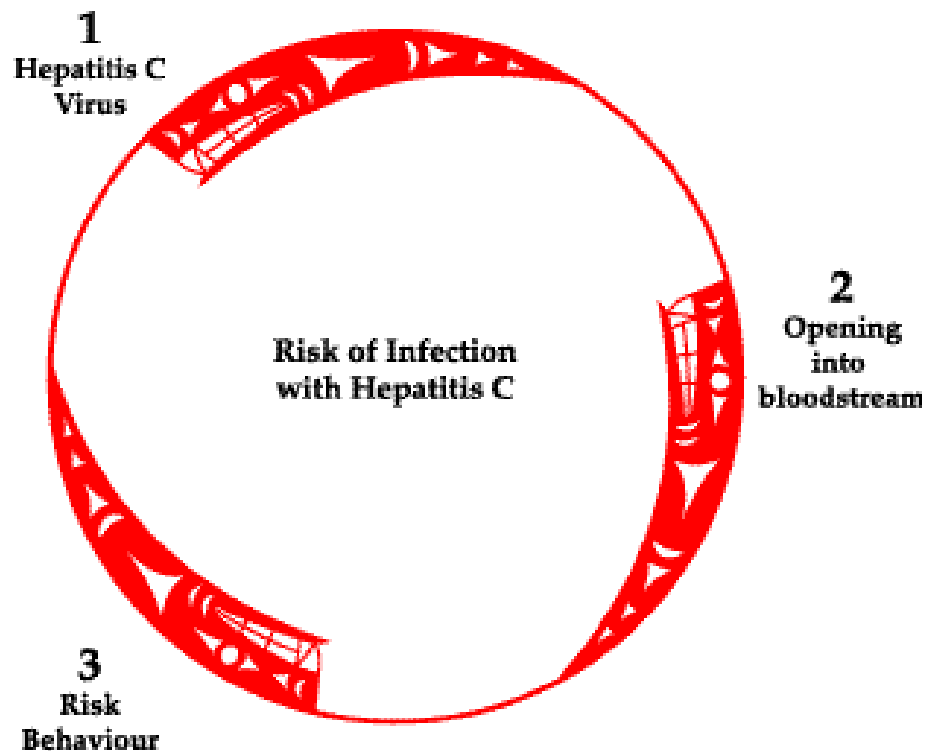
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Transmission

Blood to blood contact with infected blood

Risk of Infection with Hepatitis C



1 + 2 + 3 = Risk of infection

1. Hepatitis C virus must be present in blood
2. Opening into bloodstream such as a cut, puncture or tear
3. Activity that moves Hepatitis C virus into the bloodstream

Spirit Bear: Among some First Nation cultures, bear represents strength and agility. The White Spirit Bear of coastal British Columbia, legend says, was created by Raven as a reminder of the last ice age and represents peace and harmony.

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You may have got infected with Hepatitis C if:

- You ever shared needles to inject street drugs, as the needles (rigs, works, water) may have had someone else's blood that contained hepatitis C virus on them
- You ever shared crack pipes or snorting equipment
- You received blood, blood products or organs from a donor whose blood contained hepatitis C virus before testing of donors for hepatitis C began (in Canada, before 1990)
- You were ever on long term kidney dialysis as you may have shared supplies or equipment that had someone else's blood on them
- You were ever a health care worker and had frequent contact with blood on the job, especially accidental needle stick injuries
- Your mother had Hepatitis C at the time she gave birth to you. During birth her blood may have got into your body

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You may have got infected with Hepatitis C if:

- You have ever had unprotected sex with a person infected with hepatitis C virus
- You lived with someone who was infected with hepatitis C virus and shared such items as razors or toothbrushes that might have had his or her blood on them
- You have ever had a tattoo; someone else's blood may have been on the tattoo gun or in the tattoo ink
- You have ever participated in ceremonies involving piercing or ritual cutting with shared tools

Oral transmission of hepatitis C virus has not been proven. Breast milk, semen (cum), urine (pee), saliva (spit) and tears MAY contain hepatitis C virus, but the risk of transmission is very low.

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Hepatitis C not spread by:

- Sneezing or coughing
- Shaking hands
- Hugging and kissing
- Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses or bottles
- Swimming in a public swimming pool when you have cuts or scrapes
- Being bitten by a mosquito
- Skin contact by others with your body fluids, such as spit, urine (pee), feces (poo) or vomit
- Sitting on a toilet seat

The risk of spreading hepatitis C virus through everyday activities and contact is very low.

It is okay to show affection and share in ceremonies such as sweats, smudging and dancing.



Sacred Sweat: The eagle and the wolf, symbols of power and community form the walls of the sweat lodge. The heated stones, thrown up from the centre of Mother Earth, are the Grandmothers, the caregivers.

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Symptoms/signs of Hepatitis C

- Fatigue (feeling tired)
- Jaundice (yellow skin or eyes)
- Nausea (sick to your stomach)
- Muscle and joint pain
- Hair loss
- Skin rashes
- Headaches
- Swollen hands and feet
- Trouble sleeping
- Weight loss or loss of appetite
- Dark urine (pee)/light coloured stool (poo)
- Some people feel well, have no symptoms and don't know they have hepatitis C virus in their blood.
- Some people may have some of the symptoms; symptoms usually first appear six to nine weeks after a person has been infected with the virus.
- Some people may begin to experience long-term health problems (fatigue, lack of energy, or stomach problems), which can be difficult to diagnose.

Hepatitis C virus affects each person differently



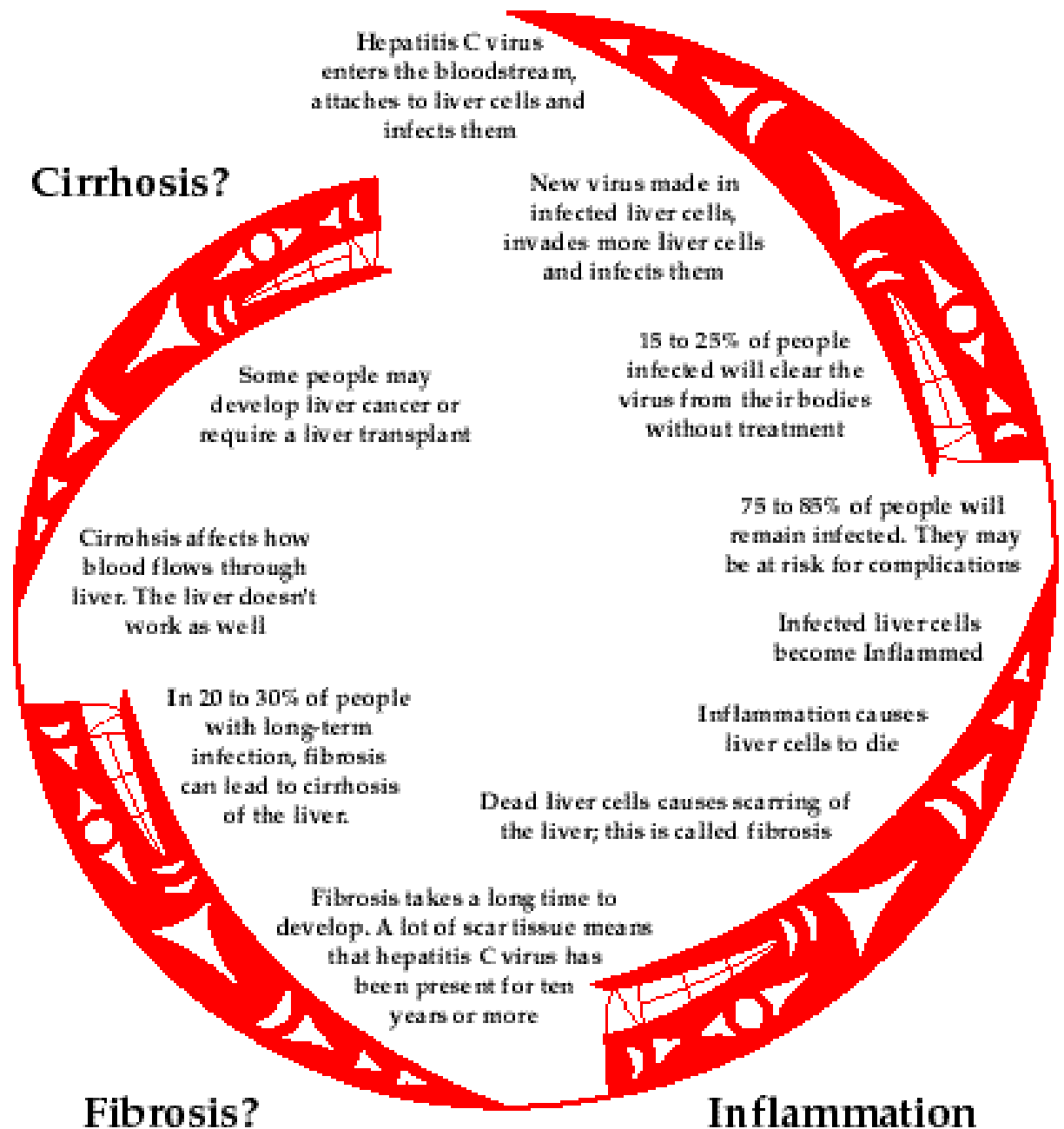
Wolf: for many First Nation cultures, wolf represents family and togetherness.

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What can happen after a person is infected with hepatitis C virus?

Effective Treatment is Available

Infection



Fibrosis?

Inflammation

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Who should get tested for Hepatitis C?

- People infected with HIV or Hepatitis B virus
- People who ever shared drug injection or snorting equipment or a crack pipe rigs, fix, water), including people who injected just once many years ago
- People who have had tattoos, or engaged in ritual piercing or cutting with shared tools
- People who were on long term kidney dialysis before testing for hepatitis C virus began
- People who received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992 or were told that they received blood from a donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C
- People who have signs or symptoms of liver disease
- Health care workers who had contact with blood or had a needle stick injury, puncture or eye splash involving blood or body fluid
- Children born to hepatitis C virus positive women (after they are one year old). A special test that detects the virus itself is recommended for children under 18 months of age.
- Long term sex partners of people infected with hepatitis C virus

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Living with Hepatitis C

- Avoid drinking alcohol; alcohol hurts your liver
- Take medications on time; they will be more effective
- Get plenty of rest and eat healthy foods
- Exercise moderately and regularly; it relieves stress and increases your energy
- Manage stress and keep a sense of humour
- See your doctor and dentist regularly; if they don't know you have hepatitis C, tell them
- Discuss issues about pregnancy and breastfeeding with your doctor or nurse
- Bandage all open cuts and sores until healed
- Ask your doctor or public health nurse about hepatitis A and B and pneumococcus vaccines, if you are not already immune. These vaccines are available free to people infected with hepatitis C virus.
- Use over the counter medications carefully. Read the labels or have someone do it for you. Talk to your pharmacist about drug interactions.
- Tylenol can affect your liver. Only use Tylenol if your doctor says it's okay to do so.



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Co-Infection

(Being infected with more than one virus or bacterium)

Co-infection with hepatitis C:

- You can be infected with Hepatitis C more than once.
- One hepatitis C virus may be different from another hepatitis C virus.
- You can be infected with more than one type of the virus.
- Infection with more than one type of the hepatitis C virus is called co-infection.

Other examples of co-infection:

- Some people may have HIV and hepatitis C infections. HIV infection may make hepatitis C worse. Treatment for HIV may damage the liver.
- Some people may have hepatitis A and hepatitis B and hepatitis C infections. Hepatitis A and B viruses are different from hepatitis C but also cause liver disease.
- Some people may have TB and HIV and hepatitis C infections.

Co-infection is also called dual or multiple diagnosis



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Steps on the Red Road: Harm Reduction for Injection Drug Users with Hepatitis C

If you use injection drugs, there are some steps you can take to reduce risks to your health and the health of other people. Each one of these steps will help a little. Taking two or more steps will help even more.

1. If you share your needles, snorting equipment or crack pipes, clean them using bleach and water.
2. Stop sharing needles or drug equipment; this will reduce the risk to you and other people
3. Always use a new needle
4. Stop using needles for drugs
5. Getting clean is hard work but it's the best way to improve your health. There are people who can help you
6. Alcohol harms the liver; reduce or stop alcohol intake. There are people who can help you
7. Avoid tattoos or body piercing; whenever there's blood, there's a risk
8. Let your sex partners know you have hepatitis C
9. Try to have only one sex partner; always use a condom



Sweat Sweat: The eagle and the wolf, symbols of power and community form the walls of the sweat lodge. The heated stones, thrown up from the centre of Mother Earth, are the Grandmothers, the caregivers.

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Treatment of Hepatitis C

The treatment recommended may depend on the genotype of the virus; not everyone responds to treatment.

Combination therapy (Rebetron):

- Combination of interferon and ribavirin
- Interferon helps your body to fight infection
- Ribavirin is an antiviral agent which fights hepatitis C virus
- Ribavirin capsules twice daily with interferon injections three times a week
- Both you and your partner must use effective birth control while taking combination therapy as Ribavirin can cause severe damage to a developing baby. Ribavirin must not be used when a woman might become pregnant. Men should always use a condom when they are taking ribavirin
- For some people combination therapy may provide a cure

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Treatment of Hepatitis C

Alternative therapies:

- There is no scientific evidence that alternative medicines are effective at treating hepatitis C
- Always let your doctor or nurse know you are taking or plan to be using any herbal remedy or alternative medicine
- Some herbs can cause serious problems to your liver
- Vitamin and mineral supplements may be helpful. Ask your doctor
- Other alternative therapies, such as acupuncture or massage may improve the sense of well-being

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Treatment of Hepatitis C

Traditional Medicines:

- The medicine wheel reminds us that being well is more than just physical; the spiritual and emotional well-being of a person can affect the way the person feels
- Sweat lodge, smudging, ceremonial brushings and other spiritual and cultural practices may help to make a person feel better
- Sacred healing herbs include sweet grass, sage, cedar and juniper



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How can I protect others?

People who have been diagnosed with hepatitis C do not need to become socially isolated. Take the following precautions to avoid spreading the virus

- Do not give blood, semen, body organs or tissues
- Do not share razors or toothbrushes, nail files and clippers
- If you use drugs, do not share needles (rigs, fix, water), snorting equipment or crack pipes
- Inform health professionals who care for you that you are infected with the virus
- Inform your sexual partner(s). Use condoms for oral, vaginal and anal sex
- Don't share razors, toothbrushes, dental floss, nail files or clippers or other personal items that may have blood on them
- Do not use a tattoo parlour unless they use only factory sealed ink and new needles just for you. It may be best not to get a tattoo
- Do not share drug equipment. Use bleach to clean areas where your blood has spilled (nine parts water to one part bleach)



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Standard Precautions

Standard precautions are steps we all should take to protect ourselves by preventing contact with the blood or body fluids of other people.

We use standard precautions because you can't tell if a person is infected with hepatitis C virus or other blood-borne disease.

The best thing to do is be cautious of every person's body fluids.

These body fluids include blood, semen and vaginal secretions. The most important body fluid to avoid contact with is blood.

Teach others, especially children, about risks of viruses and how they can be safer using standard precautions.



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Standard Precautions

Steps to take:

- Dispose of needles properly; use tongs to pick a used needle up and put it in a sharps container; this includes needles used for insulin injection by people with diabetes
- When cleaning up blood spills or spills of other body fluids, wear latex gloves
- Clean up body fluid spills with bleach and water (9 parts water and 1 part bleach)
- Dispose of clean-up garbage in sealed plastic bags immediately



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The needs of someone living with hepatitis C are like the needs of the rest of the community



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Words to Know

Antibodies: your body's natural defence to infections

Bacterium: a type of organism that can cause disease

Body Fluids: blood, semen (cum), vaginal secretions, vomit, saliva (spit), tears, urine (pee)

Cancer: a tumour that is malignant, which means it can spread around the body

Cirrhosis: severe, widespread scarring that destroys the liver

Co-infection: being infected with more than one disease at the same time

Fibrosis: scar tissue that forms in reaction to an infection

Genotype: the genetic make-up of a virus

Harm reduction: a program to help people change harmful behaviours to healthier behaviours

Hepatitis: an inflammation or swelling of the liver

Infection: an invasion of body tissues by "germs", like viruses

Inflammation: a reaction of your body to injury or disease characterized by pain, redness, heat and swelling

Liver biopsy: removal of a small piece of liver tissue that is examined under a microscope

Symptoms: the signs you see or how you feel when your body is infected

Transmission: how a virus or infection is spread from one person to another

Viral load: the amount of virus that is detectable in your blood

Virus: an organism that may cause an infection



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