

HCV AND INTRAVENOUS DRUG USE

The Plain Facts

If you're an IV drug user, there's a good chance you already have hepatitis C. "Hep C," or "HCV," is **over 10 times more contagious than HIV**, really easy to get if you shoot or snort, and very difficult, if not impossible, to get rid of. With Hep C it doesn't matter how long you've been shooting or snorting—many people get it after only using once.

The best thing to do is stop using drugs, enter a treatment program and get tested for HCV and other blood-borne viruses.

The problem is that hepatitis C is sneaky. It can do its damage slowly without your even knowing, and then, when you finally get it together—**WHAM!!**—you get really sick



GET TESTED! GET VACCINATED FOR HEP A & B

If you have ever shared needles, even once, twenty or thirty years ago, you may have Hep C and not even know it. Nine out of ten IV drug users may have it. Get tested. There is a treatment. There is no vaccine for Hep C, but you can protect yourself from getting Hep A & B. It's worse to have more than one Hep. Hep A & B vaccines are free for IV drug users in BC—no questions asked. Check with your local public health unit or needle exchange.

or find out that you're dying because your liver isn't working right.

Hep C, like Hep B and HIV, can also be transmitted by sharing toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, or other items that can cause bleeding. Sexual transmission is also considered possible but not the most likely mode of transmission. So play safe.

Safer Drug Use

Sharing any drug injecting (works or rigs) or snorting equipment can easily lead to Hep C and other diseases carried in the blood (such as hepatitis B and the AIDS virus) being passed on. Works are not just the needle and syringe, but also include spoons, mixing dishes, filters, water and citric acid.

If you inject drugs, use a new needle and syringe each time and don't share any injecting equipment. Clean the injection site with alcohol and a new cotton swab. Use sterile water to prepare drugs. Heating tap water to a boil will sterilise it. Don't use old needles, cookers or cotton to prepare drugs. New equipment can be bought from some pharmacies, or is available free from needle exchanges. In most needle exchanges you do not have to literally exchange old needles for new ones. You should be able to get a supply of new, sterilised needles.

Get Rid of Your Used Syringes Carefully

Taking your old syringes to the needle exchange is the best way to safely get rid of dirty rigs. You also get a new supply of clean rigs when you bring your old ones in.

Needle exchange schemes provide sharps containers for safe disposal. If you do not have one, put the needle and syringe into a tin can, crush carefully to ensure they do not fall out, then place in a garbage can.

If sharing is impossible to avoid, works can be cleaned between users as a last resort. Bleach should stay in the syringe for at least 30 seconds. Remember not to flush out into the clean bleach solution or water. Do not use hot water: it will make the blood congeal (clot) so traces may be left behind. Boiling works may not remove all the blood for the same reason, and disposable works usually buckle if boiled.

CLEANING WORKS

1. Draw 5% regular household bleach solution through the needle into the syringe, fill completely and flush x 3.
2. Soak the bleach-filled syringe in the bottle of bleach solution and leave for 10 minutes.
3. Draw fresh cold water through the needle into the syringe and flush x 3.

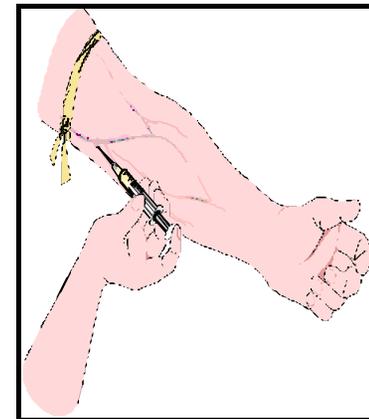
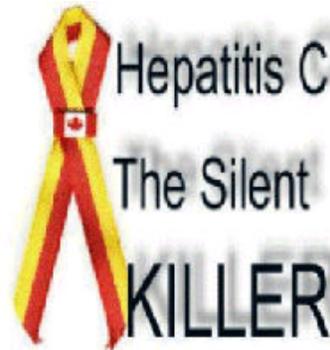
Cleaning Works...but using a new disposable needle each & every time is safer....Check out your local needle exchange!

How can I tell if I have hepatitis C?

One to two months after the hepatitis C virus infects your body, antibodies appear in your blood. A blood test can detect these antibodies and show if you have been infected with the hepatitis C virus. However, these screening tests do not show whether you are still carrying the virus in your body. So, if you have tested positive for the virus, assume you are infected and can infect other people. There is also a blood test that can tell if you are carrying the virus.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Some people feel well, have no symptoms and, therefore, don't know they have hepatitis C infection. Other people may have a brief illness with symptoms of hepatitis usually appearing six to nine weeks after they have been infected with the virus. Symptoms of acute hepatitis C infection may include: fever, tiredness, jaundice (yellow skin or eyes), abdominal pain, dark urine, loss of appetite, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach).



For Further Information, contact your public health nurse or family doctor. Your nearest hepatitis C support group office is:

On the Net:
info@hepcbc.ca
www.hepcbc.ca

DRUGS
&
HCV

Disclaimer: HepCBC will not be responsible for any damage resulting from the information in this pamphlet. Please consult a physician for medical advice.

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