

Hepatitis means swelling of the liver. Hepatitis can be caused by chemicals, drugs, alcohol and viruses. Only hepatitis that is caused by a virus can spread to other people.

Hepatitis C is a serious disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus.

SYMPTOMS

- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Not feeling hungry, upset stomach, throwing up or stomach ache
- Joint pain
- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Dark urine (pee)
- Light or grey colored stool (poop)

Many people have few or no symptoms. Symptoms can start between 2 weeks to 6 months after being infected with the virus. Within the first 6 months of getting infected (acute illness) a person could have no symptoms at all, feel a little sick or be really sick. Most people (about 8 out of 10) with hepatitis C go on to get lifelong (chronic) infection. People with lifelong infection may not know they are infected and they may not have any symptoms for up to 30 years. During that time the liver is being harmed which can lead problems like liver cancer, liver failure and death.

TREATMENT

Most people who have mild symptoms when they first get hepatitis C don't know they have it so are not treated. A few people that are infected with hepatitis C get better on their own. Their bodies get rid of the virus without treatment.

If you have lifelong hepatitis C infection you should talk to your doctor before taking any medicines, even over-the-counter or herbal drugs. Sometimes people with lifelong hepatitis C are given drugs that help kill viruses (antiviral drugs). Talk to your doctor about treatment if you have lifelong hepatitis C.

HOW IT SPREADS

Hepatitis C spreads when blood from a person with hepatitis C enters the body of a person who is not infected. This can happen when:

- You share needles, other drug equipment or even water from drug equipment with an infected person
- You are stuck with a needle or sharp object that has blood from someone with hepatitis C on it. This can happen when unclean equipment is used for tattoos and body piercings or if you work in healthcare
- You share things like razors or toothbrushes with an infected person
- A child is born to an infected mother (only about 4 out of 100 babies born to moms with hepatitis C will have it when they are born)
- You have sex with an infected partner (although this is not very likely)

Hepatitis C is **not** spread by hugging, kissing, coughing, sneezing, breast feeding or sharing food or drinks.

HOW TO PREVENT HEPATITIS C – READ THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS PAGE

Testing

Talk to your doctor about getting tested for hepatitis C if you:

- have ever used needles to take drugs, vitamins, steroids or tattoo at home
- are infected with HIV
- are exposed to blood or body fluids on the job (healthcare, police, housekeeping, janitor, etc.)
- were given donated blood or an organ before 1992
- are on dialysis treatment
- have liver tests that are not normal or liver disease
- were born between 1945 and 1965 because 3 out of every 4 people with hepatitis C were born between these years

If you're not sure whether you need to be tested for hepatitis C, talk to your doctor. Also talk to your doctor about getting hepatitis A and B vaccines to help protect your liver. At this time there is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

It is a good idea to get tested for hepatitis C because many people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. You could live for years without knowing you have hepatitis C. If you don't know you have hepatitis C, you won't know that you need to protect your liver from harm. Hepatitis C is a major cause of liver cancer and liver transplants.

Protect yourself against hepatitis C

Don't Share Needles

- Don't use needles or drug equipment (even water for "cooking") that has been used by others. Be sure tattoo and piercing artists are licensed to work in North Carolina. Watch to make sure they do not re-use needles or ink.

Use Safer Work Practices

- If you work at a place where you might touch other people's blood or body fluids, you should wear gloves to protect yourself from hepatitis C (and other diseases).

Don't Share Personal Care Items

- Don't share razors, toothbrushes or other personal care items with anyone.