

# What I need to know about Hepatitis C



NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH  
National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse

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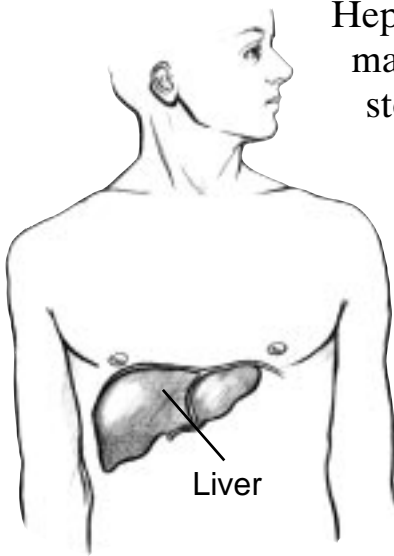
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## What is hepatitis C?

**Hepatitis C is a liver disease.**



Hepatitis (HEP-ah-TY-tis) makes your liver swell and stops it from working right.

You need a healthy liver. The liver does many things to keep you alive. The liver fights infections and stops bleeding. It removes drugs and other poisons from your blood. The liver also stores energy for when you need it.

## What causes hepatitis C?

**Hepatitis C is caused by a virus.**

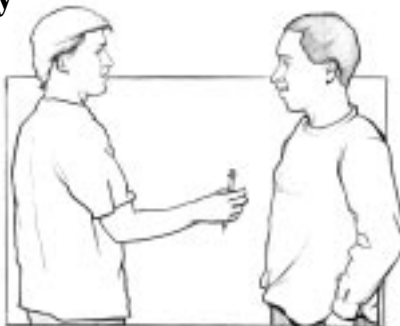
A virus is a germ that causes sickness. (For example, the flu is caused by a virus.) People can pass viruses to each other. The virus that causes hepatitis C is called the hepatitis C virus.

## How could I get hepatitis C?

**Hepatitis C is spread by contact with an infected person's blood.**

**You could get hepatitis C by**

- sharing drug needles
- getting pricked with a needle that has infected blood on it (hospital workers can get hepatitis C this way)



You could get hepatitis C by sharing drug needles.

- being born to a mother with hepatitis C
- getting a tattoo or body piercing with unsterilized, dirty tools

**In rare cases, you could get hepatitis C by**

- having sex with an infected person, especially if you or your partner has other sexually transmitted diseases

**You can NOT get hepatitis C by**

- shaking hands with an infected person
- hugging an infected person
- kissing an infected person
- sitting next to an infected person

## Could I get hepatitis C from a blood transfusion?

**If you had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992, you might have hepatitis C.**

Before 1992, doctors could not check blood for hepatitis C, and some people received infected blood. If you had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992, ask a doctor to test you for hepatitis C. (See “What are the tests for hepatitis C?” on page 5.)



A doctor can test you for hepatitis C.

## What are the symptoms?

**Many people with hepatitis C don't have symptoms.**

However, some people with hepatitis C feel like they have the flu.

### **So, you might**

- feel tired
- feel sick to your stomach
- have a fever
- not want to eat
- have stomach pain
- have diarrhea



### **Some people have**

- dark yellow urine
- light-colored stools
- yellowish eyes and skin

If you have symptoms, or think you might have hepatitis C, go to a doctor.

## What are the tests for hepatitis C?

**To check for hepatitis C, the doctor will test your blood.**

These tests show if you have hepatitis C and how serious it is.



The doctor will take some blood to check for hepatitis C.

**The doctor may also do a liver biopsy.**

A biopsy (BYE-op-see) is a simple test. The doctor removes a tiny piece of your liver through a needle. The doctor checks the piece of liver for signs of hepatitis C and liver damage.

## How is hepatitis C treated?

Hepatitis C is treated with a drug called interferon alone or in combination with the drug ribavirin.

You may need surgery if you have hepatitis C for many years. Over time, hepatitis C can cause your liver to stop working. If that happens, you will need a new liver. The surgery is called a liver transplant. It involves taking out the old, damaged liver and putting in a new, healthy one from a donor.



Hepatitis C is treated through shots of medicine.

## How can I protect myself?

### You can protect yourself and others from hepatitis C:

- Don't share drug needles with anyone.
- Wear gloves if you have to touch anyone's blood.
- Don't use an infected person's toothbrush, razor, or anything else that could have blood on it.
- If you get a tattoo or body piercing, make sure it is done with clean tools.
- If you have several sex partners, use a condom during sex.
- If you have hepatitis C, don't give your blood or plasma. The person who receives it could become infected with the virus.



If you inject drugs, use your own needles.

## For more information

You can also get information about hepatitis C from these groups:

### **American Liver Foundation**

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603

New York, NY 10038

Phone: 1-800-465-4837 (This is a free call.)

Email: [webmail@liverfoundation.org](mailto:webmail@liverfoundation.org)

Internet: [www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)

### **Hepatitis Foundation International (HFI)**

504 Blick Drive

Silver Spring, MD 20904-2901

Phone: 1-800-891-0707 or (301) 622-4200

Fax: (301) 622-4702

Email: [hepfi@hepfi.org](mailto:hepfi@hepfi.org)

Internet: [www.hepfi.org](http://www.hepfi.org)

## More in the series

There are other types of hepatitis. The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse also has booklets about hepatitis A and hepatitis B:

- *What I need to know about Hepatitis A*
- *What I need to know about Hepatitis B*

You can get a free copy of each of these booklets by calling 1-800-891-5389 or (301) 654-3810, or by writing to

**NDDIC**  
2 Information Way  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3570

Hepatitis information for health professionals is also available.



## Acknowledgments

The individuals listed here provided editorial guidance or facilitated field testing for this publication. The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse would like to thank them for their contribution.

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The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Established in 1980, the clearinghouse provides information about digestive diseases to people with digestive disorders and to their families, health care professionals, and the public. NDDIC answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about digestive diseases.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health



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National Institute of Diabetes and  
Digestive and Kidney Diseases

NIH Publication No. 02-4229  
February 2002