

# HEP C



Get Tested. Get Treated. **Get Cured.**

# HEPATITIS

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV) and is spread by contact with infected blood. This can happen through:

- Sharing of equipment to prepare and inject or snort drugs, such as needles, syringes, cookers, cotton, water or straws.
- Tattoos or body piercing in an unlicensed or informal setting, like prisons or jails.
- Sharing of personal items that may come in contact with blood, like toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers or glucose monitors.
- During birth of a child to a pregnant person with hepatitis C.

Most people with hepatitis C have no symptoms and do not know they have hepatitis C. Left untreated, hepatitis C can cause serious liver damage, liver failure, liver cancer and death. Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C. However, early diagnosis and timely access to care and treatment can prevent liver damage. Hepatitis C is treatable and curable.

## Hepatitis C and HIV Co-Infection

About one quarter of people living with HIV also have hepatitis C. Liver disease progresses more quickly in a person with HIV and HCV. Among people with HIV who use drugs, co-infection with HCV is common (50%–90%). Men with HIV who have sex with men also appear to be at higher risk of HCV infection. This could be due to rough sex or anal sex where there is blood present. Hepatitis C can be successfully treated in persons with HIV. People who are taking PrEP to prevent HIV infection, may also be at risk for hepatitis C and should be screened annually for hepatitis C.

**For anybody with hep C,  
going through what I have  
gone through, I get it. I've  
been there. It gets better.  
It gets so much better.**

**Casey, Albany**



# HEPATITIS Screening

**Getting tested is the only way to know if you have hepatitis C.**

**You should get tested for hepatitis C if you:**

- Are 18 years of age or older (get tested at least once).
- Are pregnant (get tested during each pregnancy).
- Injected drugs, even just once many years ago.
- Have HIV.
- Received donated blood or organs before 1992.
- Received clotting factor before 1987.
- Were exposed to blood on the job through a needle stick or injury with a sharp object.
- Were ever on long-term dialysis.
- Got a tattoo or body piercing from an unlicensed artist, such as on the street or while in jail.
- Snorted drugs.

## **Hepatitis C Antibody Test**

The first test you need to determine if you have hepatitis C is a hepatitis C antibody test. This is a blood test that looks for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus. The test can be done by collecting a blood sample and sending it to a lab, or by a finger stick using a hepatitis C rapid antibody test. The hepatitis C antibody test will tell you if you have ever been infected with hepatitis C. It will not tell you if you have hepatitis C now. You will need a second test to know if you are currently infected.

**A hepatitis C antibody test result can be either Non-Reactive/Negative or Reactive/Positive.**

- **A non-reactive or negative antibody test** means that you are not currently infected with the hepatitis C virus. However, if you have engaged in risky behavior such as sharing injection drug equipment in the last 6 months, you will need to be tested again.
- **A reactive or positive antibody test** means that you have antibodies to hepatitis C in your blood. You were exposed to hepatitis C at one time. You may have hepatitis C. You will need a second test to know for sure.



**It's not complicated.  
Get a simple blood test  
and information from your  
doctor about hepatitis C.**

**Kenneth, Brooklyn**

# HEPATITIS Diagnosis

If your hepatitis C antibody test is reactive, a second test will be needed to diagnose and determine if you currently have hepatitis C. This second test is called an HCV RNA test, also known as an HCV PCR test. The RNA test checks for the presence or amount of hepatitis C virus in your blood. An HCV RNA test result can either be undetectable or detectable. Sometimes the result may also be reported as a viral load (the amount of virus in your blood).

- An ‘undetectable’ test result means you don’t have virus in your blood and are not currently infected.
- A ‘detectable’ test result means that you have hepatitis C virus in your blood and that you are currently infected with hepatitis C. This test result may also show your viral load.

## Benefits of Early Diagnosis of Hepatitis C


Once you learn that you have hepatitis C, talk to your medical provider about treatment. Don’t wait until you feel sick to get treated. Early diagnosis and medical care are key to better health. Even before starting treatment, there’s a lot you can do to stay healthy and protect your liver from damage.

- Avoid or reduce your alcohol consumption.
- Make sure you are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Eat healthy, exercise and get enough rest.
- See your health care provider for regular check- ups.
- Talk with your health care provider before taking any prescription, over-the-counter medications, supplements or vitamins.

## Minimize Risk of Passing Hepatitis C to Others

- If you inject drugs, do it as safely as you can.
- Avoid sharing any injection or other drug use equipment (syringes, ties, cotton, cooker, water, straws, etc.).
- Avoid sharing personal care items that may have blood on them - such as razors, toothbrushes or nail clippers.
- Practice safer sex by using condoms or dental dams. Avoid sex with blood exposure or tearing of tissues.

Hepatitis C is not spread through casual contact such as: sneezing, coughing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses.



**It doesn't matter how you  
got hep C. Let's help one  
another and make sure  
everybody gets cured.**

**Ronni, Manhattan**


# HEPATITIS Care and Treatment

Once you learn that you have hepatitis C, it is important to talk with your health care provider about treatment, even if you were refused treatment in the past or had treatment that didn't work. Almost everyone can be cured with the medications now available. Most people can even be treated for hepatitis C by their regular primary care provider.

## Hepatitis C Treatment

- Treatment can eliminate the hepatitis C virus from the body. This is called a sustained viral response or SVR and is considered a cure. A SVR reduces your risk of liver damage and improves your quality of life.
- Treatment is recommended for most people with hepatitis C, including people who are actively using drugs, who have HIV, or who have advanced liver disease.
- Hepatitis C treatment is easy to take - often one dose once a day for 8 to 12 weeks - and has few side effects.
- Three months (or 12 weeks) after you finish taking your hepatitis C treatment, your health care provider will repeat a hepatitis C RNA test to confirm treatment success.
- If the test does not detect hepatitis C virus in your blood, you are cured.
- If there is still hepatitis C virus in your blood, you are not cured. If you are not cured, it is important to stay in care. Talk to your health care provider about the benefit of repeating hepatitis C treatment. A different combination of medication might work for you.
- It's important to know that even if you are successfully treated, you are not protected from getting re-infected with hepatitis C in the future.





**After hep C treatment,  
I was cured. I really couldn't  
believe it. It changed something  
in me and gave me a little bit  
more hope I was going to be OK.**

**Liza, Buffalo**

# HEPATITIS Hear Our Stories



Learn how you can help eliminate hep C: [health.ny.gov/nycureshepc](https://health.ny.gov/nycureshepc)

**To find out more information about hepatitis C or to find a syringe exchange program or a drugstore that sells syringes without a prescription call 1-800-522-5006 or visit [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov).**

**To find help for drug use, alcoholism or problem gambling, call 1-877-8-HOPENY or 1-877-846-7369.**

