

Caring for your baby with hepatitis C



What you need to know



What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus, which can be passed from a pregnant person to their baby during pregnancy and childbirth. This is the most common cause of hepatitis C in children.

The risk of passing the virus from a pregnant person with hepatitis C to their baby is about 1 in 20. This risk is higher if the pregnant person also has HIV.



Tell your baby's pediatrician if you had hepatitis C while pregnant.

If you had hepatitis C while pregnant, it's possible that your baby will be born with the virus. Hepatitis C may cause serious health problems as your child gets older, if left untreated. However, hepatitis C is curable.

Telling your baby's pediatrician will get your baby the care and follow-up they need.



Hepatitis C testing

Testing is the only way to know if your baby has hepatitis C. Your baby will need a blood test, the hepatitis C RNA test, to check if they have the virus. Speak to your baby's pediatrician about hepatitis C testing during a well-child visit. Testing should be done when your baby is between the ages of 2 to 6 months.

Knowing your baby's hepatitis C status will help you get them the care they need.



Hepatitis C care and treatment

If your baby is diagnosed with hepatitis C, it is important that you take your baby to see a pediatrician for further evaluation. Most babies born with hepatitis C never develop symptoms, but the virus can still cause damage to their liver.

Some babies born with hepatitis C will “clear” or get rid of the virus on their own. Those who do not will require treatment. Your baby can be treated and cured for hepatitis C when they reach 3 years of age. Hepatitis C medications are not currently approved for use in children younger than 3 years of age.



Breastfeeding

Hepatitis C is not found in breast milk. You can safely breastfeed your baby even if you have hepatitis C. However, little is known about breastfeeding while taking hepatitis C medication. Avoid breastfeeding if you are taking hepatitis C treatment. Talk to your health care provider about postponing hepatitis C treatment until you stop breastfeeding your baby.

Hepatitis C is found in your blood. Therefore, if your nipple becomes cracked or bleeds, stop breastfeeding with that breast while it heals. Speak with a lactation consultant about a plan to maintain your milk supply. You can continue to breastfeed using the unaffected breast.



Your child can play with siblings and other children.

There is no need to limit your child's activities. They may participate in day care, school, and other everyday activities. You do not have to disclose your child's hepatitis C status.

Hepatitis C is not passed through casual contact such as kissing, hugging, touching, or sharing food. It is passed only through blood contact. So, if your child is bleeding, or has a cut, cover the wound with a bandage to prevent others from coming into contact with their blood.

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For more information about hepatitis C visit: <http://health.ny.gov/hepatitisC>.

To find help for pregnant and parenting people, call the Growing Up Healthy Hotline: 1-800-522-5006
TTY: 1-800-655-1789