

Fact Sheet: Hepatitis C

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness. Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C.

Signs and Symptoms

Approximately 70%–80% of people with acute Hepatitis C do not have any symptoms. Some people, however, can have mild to severe symptoms soon after being infected, including

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Jaundice (yellow color in the skin or eyes)

If symptoms occur, the average time is six to seven weeks after exposure, but this can range from two weeks to six months.

Treatment

There is no medication available to treat acute Hepatitis C infection. Doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. Each person should discuss treatment options with a doctor who specializes in treating hepatitis. People with chronic Hepatitis C should be monitored regularly for signs of liver disease and evaluated for treatment. They should avoid alcohol because it can cause additional liver damage.

How is it spread?

People can become infected with the Hepatitis C virus during such activities as

- Sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject drugs
- Needle stick injuries in health care settings
- Being born to a mother who has Hepatitis C

Though less common, a person can also get Hepatitis C virus infection through:

- Sharing personal care items that may have come in contact with another person's blood, such as razors or toothbrushes
- Having sexual contact with a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus

Prevention

- Don't share needles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- If you are a health care worker, follow routine barrier precautions; handle needles and other sharps safely.
- **Don't use IV drugs.** If you do use IV drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, **NEVER** reuse or share your drug works. Contact your local health department for more information on cleaning your works and needle exchange programs.
- If you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing, remember that you can get infected if the tools haven't been cleaned properly or if the artist doesn't wear clean gloves with each new customer.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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