

# Fact Sheet

## Hepatitis C

### What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease from infection with the hepatitis C virus (HCV).

### What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C?

Most people infected with HCV have no symptoms or mild illness. Symptoms can include: not wanting to eat, stomach pain, dark urine, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, and sometimes jaundice (yellow skin and eyes).

About 1 in 4 people infected will naturally clear the virus from their body. About half of people infected can carry HCV for the rest of their lives (chronic HCV infection), and have the risk of developing liver cirrhosis and liver failure.

### How is it spread?

HCV is most often spread by contact with blood, including:

- Injection drug use or sharing of drug use equipment
- Sharing or use of unclean tattooing, piercing, acupuncture or electrolysis equipment
- Exposure to blood and blood products not tested for HCV. In Canada, this applies to blood and blood products received before 1992.
- An accidental needle stick injury with a needle used by someone with HCV infection
- Sharing toothbrushes, dental floss, razors, nail files or other items which could have blood on them
- Sexual contact (rarely)
- From a mother to her baby before or at the time of birth (rarely)

HCV infection is not known to be spread by coughing, sneezing, hugging, kissing, using the same dishes or cutlery as an infected person, or contact with body fluids such as saliva, vomit, urine or feces. Breastfeeding is not a risk for HCV, but if nipples are cracked or bleeding consider stopping breastfeeding until they have healed as HCV can be spread through blood.

### How do you know you have Hepatitis C?

A blood test is used to diagnose HCV.

### What is the treatment?

People who are infected with HCV should see their healthcare provider regularly and have regular blood testing to check liver function. Some people may be eligible for treatment.

### How can Hepatitis C be prevented?

To reduce the risk of getting HCV:

- Do not share needles or other equipment used to inject drugs or cosmetic substances
- Do not share personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person's blood, such as razors, nail clippers or toothbrushes
- Do not get tattoos or piercings from unlicensed facilities or in an informal setting
- Use safer sex practices