

How can you prevent HCV infection?

Currently, there is no vaccine for HCV, therefore all measures should be taken to prevent HCV transmission. Prevention includes:

- ◆ Avoid sharing of needles, syringes, filters or mixing spoons for drug use.
- ◆ Avoid sharing of toothbrushes, shaving equipment, or anything else that may be contaminated with infected blood.
- ◆ Use condoms and lubrication during penetrative sex.

Where can you get help?

- ◆ Consult your family doctor (GP)
- ◆ **GU (Genitourinary) Clinic**
For an appointment call 21 227 981. **Confidentiality is guaranteed**
- ◆ Contact the **Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate** on 2326 6000

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Sexual health is more than freedom from sexual disease... Sexual health is non-exploitive and respectful of self and others... is dependent upon an individual's well-being and sense of self-esteem. Sexual health requires trust, honesty, and communication.



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Hepatitis C



HCV



This leaflet provides information about Hepatitis C, its mode of transmission and ways to prevent it.

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HBV - HCV - HIV

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a **viral infection** that causes inflammation of the liver. HCV is less easily passed on than Hep B or HIV, but it can be the most damaging form of disease.

How is Hepatitis C transmitted?

The Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is **transferred primarily through blood** including dried blood, but may also be present in semen and vaginal fluids.

Ways you can become infected with HCV:

- ◆ Sharing drug-injecting equipment (needles, filters, heating spoons, etc). This is the primary transmission route for HCV.
- ◆ Sharing equipment used to snort cocaine, which can become contaminated with blood from a person's nose.
- ◆ Using non-sterilised equipment for tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing.
- ◆ Exposure to blood during unprotected sex with an infected person. (Sexual transmission is an uncommon way of becoming infected with HCV).
- ◆ Rarely, from an infected mother to her baby during childbirth.

Hepatitis C **CANNOT** be transmitted through:

Hugging, Sneezing, Coughing,
Sharing food or water and cutlery,
Casual contact.

What are the signs and symptoms of HCV?

Many people do not experience any symptoms when they become infected with hepatitis C. An infected person without symptoms can still be a carrier and pass the virus on to others. Symptoms can appear from two weeks to six months after infection. These include:

- ◆ tiredness
- ◆ anxiety
- ◆ weight loss
- ◆ loss of appetite
- ◆ alcohol intolerance
- ◆ pain around the liver
- ◆ concentration problems
- ◆ flu-like symptoms
- ◆ Jaundice (yellowish whites of eyes and skin, dark urine and pale faeces)
- ◆ Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.
- ◆ itchy skin.

Only about 20% of persons infected with HCV will clear the virus from their body within 6 months, though this does not mean they are immune from future infection with HCV.

The other 80% of people will develop chronic hepatitis C infection, meaning that they will carry the virus for the rest of their lives and will remain infectious to others. This increases the risk of developing liver cirrhosis and liver cancer.

How is HCV treated?

The body is unlikely to clear HCV on its own. Thus, treatment is often used, which is only 30-50% successful. Consult your family doctor / GU clinic for testing and treatment.

The infected person should limit the amount of alcohol they drink as alcohol puts strain on the liver. Fatty foods and a diet high in salt should be avoided too.

