



Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is sometimes called hep C.

Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus that can damage your liver.

The good news is that hepatitis C can now be cured.

Hepatitis C is very common in our community. We need to get informed about hepatitis C so we can stop people in our community from getting it.

How do you get hepatitis C?

You can get hepatitis C if the blood from someone who has hepatitis C gets into your blood stream.

You can get hepatitis C from sharing drug injecting equipment or tattoo equipment with someone who has hepatitis C.

You can also get hepatitis C from:

- having sex without a condom with someone who has hepatitis C. This is because sometimes people get tears in their skin during sex and bleed, especially if they also have an STI
- sharing personal items that may have small amounts of blood on them, like toothbrushes, razors, or sex toys
- blood from a person who has hepatitis C getting directly into an open cut.

Although rare, babies can be born with hepatitis C if the mother has hepatitis C – especially if the mother also has HIV.

People who spend time in prison are at a higher risk of getting hepatitis C from sharing drug injecting or tattoo equipment. This is because a lot of people in prison have hepatitis C.



Safe injecting

Do not share injecting equipment with someone else. Hepatitis C can be passed on in infected blood. A needle or syringe might look clean but there could be a tiny amount of blood you can't see.

You can get clean needles and syringes in chemists, health clinics, and community centres.

Safe tattooing and piercing

Do not share tattooing or piercing equipment with someone else. Hepatitis C can be passed on in small amounts of blood you can't see.

It's best to get tattoos in a tattoo shop because you can make sure they use clean equipment.

Can you get hepatitis C from food, water, mosquitoes, or from toilet seats? Or by kissing or hugging?

No.

Symptoms – how would I know if I got hepatitis C?

There are usually no symptoms or signs straight away. Sometimes people feel well for years. This means you can have hepatitis C and not know it.

Hepatitis C can damage the liver. People with advanced liver disease can feel very tired for no reason and feel sick. Advanced liver disease can also cause dark pee, yellowing of the skin and eyes, pain in the right side and back, tummy pain, and loss of appetite.

The only way of knowing whether you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

Testing for hepatitis C

Testing for hepatitis C can be done at the clinic. They will take a blood sample. You can get tested as part of your men's or women's health check – just ask.



If you've shared injecting or tattooing equipment ask at the clinic about getting tested.

Don't be shame

Testing for hepatitis C means you're looking after your health. If more people in our community test for hepatitis C, and get treated, everyone is better off.

Test results are confidential. Your partner will not be told about your result without your permission. No one else in your family or community will be told about your result without your permission.

Your confidential test results are sent to health departments so we know whether STI and BBV rates are going up or down in a community. The test results are strictly guarded in confidential computers and locked rooms and only used to understand level of infections in a region. Health departments only let a small number of doctors or nurses use the confidential computers with STI or BBV records to keep the information safe.

What's the treatment for hepatitis C? Is there a cure?

There is no medicine or vaccine to stop you from getting hepatitis C.

But there is good treatment for hepatitis C - medicines called direct-acting antivirals. These are sometimes called 'DAAs'.

For many people treatment for hepatitis C is just taking 1 to 2 tablets once or twice a day, for 8 to 24 weeks. Your doctor will work out the best treatment for you.

If you get treated for hepatitis C, and cured, you can get hepatitis C again from having sex without a condom, or sharing injecting or tattooing equipment.

It's important to keep using condoms and to keep testing regularly for STIs and BBVs – at least every six to 12 months.

What if I don't get treated?

If you don't get treated for hepatitis C it can cause liver failure and cancer.



Letting partners know they need to test

If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C, you will need to let your partners know they should get tested. This is to make sure they don't have hepatitis C too. This is called "contact tracing".

Contact tracing is not about blame. It's just to make sure that as many people as possible who may have hepatitis C get tested and treated.

The clinic can help you with contact tracing – but only with your permission. This is confidential – the clinic will let people you have had sex or inject with know that it's time to have a test. The clinic will not mention your name to the people they contact.

If you prefer to do this yourself, have a look at the **Better to know** website for advice about different ways you can let people know that they need to have a test – including on how to do this anonymously - without giving your name.

Condoms can stop STIs and BBVs from spreading

Here's how to use a condom:

- ⦿ Check expiry date, check the package is not damaged and open with care
- ⦿ Pinch the tip so air doesn't get trapped
- ⦿ Roll on when the penis is hard
- ⦿ Use water-based lubricant (lube). Oil based lubricant can damage the condom
- ⦿ When withdrawing, hold the base of the condom so semen (cum) doesn't spill out
- ⦿ Tie a knot in the used condom and put it in the bin. Not down the toilet as it will block the pipes.

Let's look after our health and get tested for BBVs and STIs. If we all test and get treated, we can stop the spread of BBVs and STIs in our community.