



Learn more about hepatitis C

If you have hep C, you are not alone. About 2.3 million people are living with chronic hep C in the United States.

Below are some commonly asked questions about hep C.

About chronic hepatitis C



What is hep C?

Hep C is a disease caused by a virus that infects the liver. A hep C infection can lead to inflammation of the liver and cause the immune system to attack healthy liver cells. It can be spread through blood-to-blood contact or when the blood from a person with hep C comes into contact with another person's blood.

What are the symptoms of hep C?

- Most people with hep C don't have noticeable symptoms at first—or ever. That means you may not know you have it.
- The most common symptoms of chronic hep C are **tiredness** and **depression**.

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Additional questions

How is hep C spread?

Hep C is commonly spread by:

- Sharing drug needles or accidental needlestick injuries
- Being born to a mother who has hep C

Less commonly, hep C is spread by:

- Contact with someone's blood in razors or toothbrushes
- Sex
- Getting a tattoo or body piercing in an unregulated setting

Hep C CANNOT be spread by:

- Food, water, or sharing eating utensils
- Hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing



Who should get tested for hep C?

Talk to your doctor about being tested for hep C if:

- You are over the age of 18
- You are pregnant
- You used to snort or inject drugs
- You were tattooed at an unlicensed shop
- You received certain blood products before 1987 or received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before 1992
- You are or were a long-term dialysis patient
- You went to jail or prison
- You have HIV
- Your mother had hep C when you were born
- You work in a place where needlestick injuries can happen

How can you reduce the risk of getting hep C?

There are ways to lessen the risk of getting the hep C virus that you may want to discuss with your family and friends. Some of these include:

- Avoid sharing or reusing needles, syringes, or any other equipment to prepare and inject drugs, steroids, hormones, or other substances
- Don't share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, or other personal care items that may have come into contact with infected blood
- Only get tattoos or body piercings from a formal, licensed facility

What tests are used to detect hep C?

There are several blood tests that doctors will perform to find out if you have hep C, including:

- The hep C **antibody test**, which can tell if you've ever been infected with the virus
- The hep C **virus RNA test**, which can tell if you have a current infection

It is important to follow up with your doctor about these tests after they are performed.

Key hep C terms

What are genotypes?

Hepatitis C includes several distinct genotypes, or genetic strains of the virus. Your doctor will take your viral genotype into consideration when deciding what treatment to offer you, the dosage of your medications, and how long the treatment will last.

There are 6 known major genotypes and more than 50 subtypes of hepatitis C. In the United States, genotype 1 is most common.

What does “cured” mean?

“Cured” means that hep C is no longer detectable in your blood 3 months after you finish your hep C treatment. Twelve weeks after you complete your treatment, your doctor will do a blood test to determine if the hep C virus can still be detected.

What is cirrhosis of the liver?

Chronic hepatitis C can lead to scarring of the liver (sometimes called “cirrhosis”). In patients with cirrhosis, scar tissue replaces healthy tissue.

Cirrhosis can progress so slowly that people feel no symptoms for years, until damage to the liver has begun to take place. Some visible signs of cirrhosis are red palms, small spider-like veins on your face or body, and fluid in your abdomen (gut area).

Your doctor will consider whether you have cirrhosis when determining what treatment options are appropriate for you.



Normal liver



Cirrhosis

What is chronic hep C?

- Chronic hep C is when the infection is long-term or lasts more than 6 months
- More than half of people who get infected with hep C develop a chronic infection, which can last a lifetime