



HEPATITIS C

What Is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is a disease of the liver caused by a virus. There are many types of hepatitis: hepatitis A, B, C, and some less common types. All of the types of hepatitis affect the liver. A few, such as hepatitis B and C, can cause chronic liver damage or even death.

How Does a Person Get Hepatitis?

Hepatitis A is also called “infectious hepatitis.” You can get it by eating food that has not been washed or handled properly or by drinking water that has not been filtered. In both cases, the food or water has been exposed to feces that have the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis B and C are spread from one person to another through blood and body fluids. There are vaccines to protect people from getting Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B. There is no vaccine to protect people from Hepatitis C.

Am I at Risk for Hepatitis C?

You are at risk for getting Hepatitis C if you are using intravenous drugs, if you are getting blood transfusions, if you are having sex with many partners, or if your partner has Hepatitis C. The risk is higher for some people compared with others. See the flip side for a list of persons who should be tested for Hepatitis C.

If I Have Hepatitis C and I Am Pregnant, Can I Give Hepatitis C to My Baby?

The virus that causes Hepatitis C is in your blood. The baby creates and maintains a separate blood supply and usually has no contact with your blood during pregnancy. There is a chance that the baby will get Hepatitis C when he or she is in contact with your body fluids in the vagina during birth. The risk to the baby depends on how much active virus you have in your body at the time of birth. Overall, the risk is between 4% and 7%. That means that of every 100 pregnant women with Hepatitis C, 4 to 7 of them will pass the virus to their babies during birth. If you have Hepatitis C, your baby should be tested for it when he or she is 12 to 18 months old.

If the Danger Is During Birth, Should I Have a Cesarean Birth?

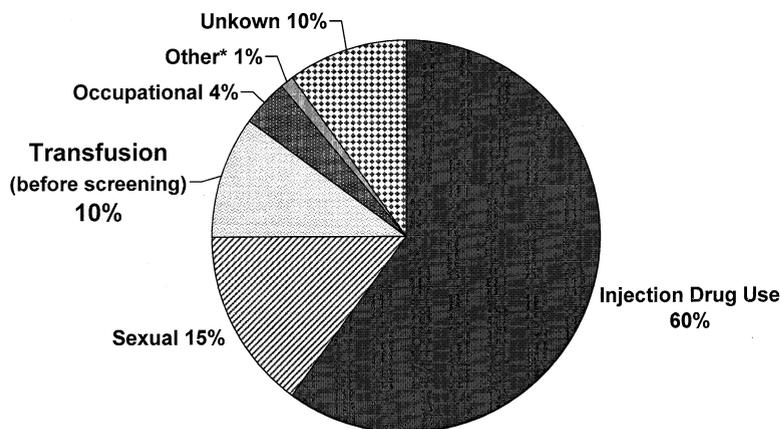
It is not certain whether having a cesarean delivery will protect your baby. Most health care providers believe that a vaginal birth is the safest for both you and your baby. If you have Hepatitis C, talk with your health care provider and consult a specialist in infectious disease about the birth plan that is best for you.

If I Have Hepatitis C, Can I Breastfeed?

Yes. Studies have not found any link between breastfeeding and passing Hepatitis C to a baby. In fact, breastfeeding helps babies build their own immune systems, so you will help protect your baby against many diseases by breastfeeding.

How Do People Get Hepatitis C?

Many people who have hepatitis C do not know they have it. They may not have any signs of the illness. They may live 10 to 20 years before they show signs of liver damage. Even though they do not show signs of hepatitis C, they can still give it to others.



*Infected while in hospital (nosocomial); infected by health practitioner (iatrogenic); infected during or after birth (perinatal). Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site.

Who Should Be Tested For Hepatitis C?*

If You:	Your Risk of Getting Hepatitis C Is:	Testing Recommended?
Use intravenous (IV) drugs	High	Yes
Received clotting factors (medicine to keep you from bleeding too much) before 1987	High	Yes
Have ever been on hemodialysis (blood cleansing)	Medium	Yes
Received a blood transfusion and/or solid organs before 1992	Medium	Yes
Have any liver problems	Medium	Yes
Work in health care or public safety	Low	Only after known exposure
Are having sex with many partners	Low	No [†]
Are having sex with a person who has Hepatitis C	Low	No [†]

*Talk with your health care provider if you wish to be tested. Adapted from the CDC Web site.

[†]If you are concerned that a past or present partner may have had hepatitis C, you may want to be tested. Using latex condoms may help prevent hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted diseases.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<http://www.hepc-connection.org/>

This Web site has lots of information on Hepatitis C, including legal aspects, medical treatments, and information for people with more than 1 infection (e.g., HIV and Hepatitis C).

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>

The CDC Web site has up-to-date information on most diseases, including Hepatitis C. You can also find the current treatment recommendations for Hepatitis C as well as many other illnesses.

Reading level: 7.2

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