

## **What is Hepatitis C ?**

Hepatitis C is a bloodborne virus that can lead to liver disease; this virus may cause both acute and chronic hepatitis infections. Acute HCV infections are usually asymptomatic, which means you may experience little to no symptoms. Some infected persons with acute HCV spontaneously clear the virus within 6 months of infection without any treatment. For those infected persons who aren't able to do the same, the condition can worsen. Chronic HCV is a long-term illness that occurs when the Hepatitis C virus remains in a person's system. This chronic condition can last a lifetime and lead to fibrosis, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), or even liver cancer.

## **Symptoms**

Hepatitis C incubation period is 2 weeks to 6 months. For those who are acutely symptomatic some common indicators you may exhibit are...

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Decreased appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Grey-coloured feces
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin and the whites of the eyes)

## **Transmission**

### More Common

- Sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject drugs
- Reuse or inadequate sterilization of medical equipment, especially syringes and needles in healthcare settings
- Transfusion of unscreened blood and blood products

## Less Common

- Being born to a mother who has Hepatitis C
- Sharing personal care items that may have come in contact with another person's blood (razors or toothbrushes)
- Having sexual contact with a person that is infected with HCV

## **FAQs**

### **1. What are ways Hepatitis C is not spread?**

Hepatitis C is not spread by sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing or sneezing. Also not spread through food or water.

### **2. Can Hepatitis C be spread within a household?**

Yes, but it does not occur often. If it does, it is most likely a result of direct, though-the-skin exposure to the blood of an infected household member.

### **3. How should blood spills be cleaned from surfaces to make sure that HCV is gone?**

Any blood spills, including dried blood can still be infectious; should be cleaned using a dilution of one part household bleach to 10 parts water. Gloves should be worn when cleaning up blood spills.

### **4. Can I donate blood, organs, or semen if I have Hepatitis C?**

No, if you ever tested positive for the Hepatitis C virus (or Hepatitis B virus), experts recommend never donating blood, organs or semen because it can spread the infection to the recipient.

### **5. Can a person spread Hepatitis C without having symptoms?**

Yes, even if a person with Hepatitis C having no symptoms, he or she can still spread the virus to others.

### **6. Is it possible to have Hepatitis C and not know it?**

Yes, many people who are infected with HCV do not know they are infected because they do look or feel sick.

## **Screening and Diagnosis**

HCV infection diagnosed in 2 steps:

1. Screening for anti-HCV antibodies with a serological blood test identifies people who have been infected with the virus.
2. If the test is positive for anti-HCV antibodies, a nucleic acid test for HCV ribonucleic acid (RNA) is needed to confirm chronic infection because about 15-45% of people with HCV spontaneously clear the infection by a strong immune response without the need for treatment. Although they may no longer be infected, they will still test positive for anti-HCV antibodies.

## **Primary Prevention**

- Hand hygiene: including surgical hand preparation, hand washing, and use of gloves
- Safe handling and disposal of sharps and waste
- Testing of donated blood for hepatitis B and C (including HIV and syphilis)
- Training of health personnel
- Promotion of correct and consistent use of condoms

## **Secondary and tertiary prevention** *(for people infected with the hepatitis C virus)*

- Education and counseling on options for care and treatment
- Immunization with hepatitis A and B vaccines to prevent possible future infection against these hepatitis viruses
- Early and appropriate medical management including antiviral therapy if needed
- Regular monitoring for early diagnosis of chronic liver disease

## **Hepatitis Testing Centers**

Hepatitis C Clinic

Blake 4

**Massachusetts General Hospital**

55 Fruit Street

Boston, MA 02114

**Phone:** 617-724-6006

**Fax:** 617-724-6832

**Hours:** 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday

**Tufts Medical Center (Therapy of Chronic Hepatitis)**

800 Washington Street

Boston, MA, 02111

**Phone:** 617-636-5000

**Boston Public Health Commission (Hepatitis Testing)**

1010 Massachusetts Ave, 2nd Floor

Boston, MA 02118

Monica Valdes Lupi, JD, MPH, Executive D

**Phone:** 617-534-3976

**Email:** [info@bphc.org](mailto:info@bphc.org)

**Gastroenterology Healthcare Associates (Specializes in Hepatitis)**

2000 Washington St., Suite 368

Newton, MA 02462

**Phone:** 617 681 5626

**Fax:** 1 617 969 2676

## **Hepatitis C Support Groups**

### **Boston Medical Center**

Boston MA

**Meets on:** 1st Wednesday of the month

**Meets at:** 6:00-7:30 PM

**Contact:** Tiffany Geahigan

**PA Email:** [Tiffany.Geahigan@bmc.org](mailto:Tiffany.Geahigan@bmc.org)

**Phone:** 617-543-5072

### **East Boston Neighborhood Health Center**

Boston MA

**Meets on:** 2nd Wednesday of the month

**Meets at:** 6:00-7:30 PM

**Contact:** Tiffany Geahigan

**PA Email:** [Tiffany.Geahigan@bmc.org](mailto:Tiffany.Geahigan@bmc.org)

### **University of Mass Hospital**

**Lecture Hall B**

Worcester MA

**Meets on:** 1st Monday of the month

**Meets at:** 6:30-8:00 PM

**Contact:** Larry

**Email:** [lotl@ziplink.net](mailto:lotl@ziplink.net)

### **American Liver Foundation - New England Chapter**

88 Winchester Street

Newton MA 2461

**Email:** [info@liverfoundation-ne.org](mailto:info@liverfoundation-ne.org)

**Phone:** 800-298-6766