

Hepatitis C Basics

What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver that is most often caused by a virus, such as the Hepatitis C virus.

Can the Immune System Fight Off the Hepatitis C Virus?

A certain percentage of people can clear the Hepatitis C virus, but most people who are infected with Hepatitis C develop a long-term chronic infection.

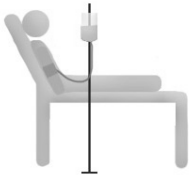
How is Hepatitis C Transmitted? Primarily through blood-to-blood transfer, such as:



Injection Drug Use with shared equipment, including needles, syringes, cottons, filters, cookers, spoons, and rinse water



Non-Professional Tattoos or Piercings with shared needles or ink, especially in a jail/prison setting where Hepatitis C is prevalent



Receiving Blood Products or Organ Transplants *before 1992* when sensitive tests were first used for blood/organ screening



Snorting Drugs with a Shared Nasal Delivery Tool (AKA straw/bill/tooter)
(snorting drugs irritates the nasal canal, which can lead to bleeding and inflammation)



Sharing Personal Hygiene Items Contaminated with Infectious Blood (razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, etc.)



Occupational Exposure (needle-stick injury)



Unprotected Sexual Contact where Bleeding or Rectal Fluid is Present*
(sex with a person who is menstruating [period sex], rough sex that causes tearing or bleeding, especially anal sex)

**Note: The science is still emerging on sexual risk for Hepatitis C. Visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm for the latest information.*



Pregnancy & Childbirth
(vertical transmission)

Is Hepatitis C Spread by Casual Contact?

No. Hepatitis C is primarily spread through blood-to-blood contact, so the following pose no known risk for Hepatitis C transmission:

- Air or Water
- Animals or Insects, including Mosquitos, Fleas, Ticks, or Bed Bugs
- Saliva, Tears, or Sweat (unless infected blood is present)
- Nasal Fluid, Vomit, Urine, or Feces (unless infected blood is present)
- Breastmilk (unless infected blood is present around the nipple due to chafing or cracking)
- Casual Contact, such as Shaking Hands, Kissing, Hugging, or Sharing Dishes, Utensils, or Glasses (unless infected blood is present)
- Drinking Fountains or Toilet Seats

How to Prevent Hepatitis C Infection:

- **Avoid Sharing Any Injection Drug Equipment—**
Always try to use brand new rigs and don't share cookers, spoons, cottons, or rinse water.
- **Use Reputable Tattoo & Piercing Shops—**
Make sure you get your body art from professionals who know about disease prevention.
- **Avoid Sharing Straws for Snorting Drugs—**
Carry your own straw and don't share it with others.
- **Practice Safer Sex—**
Always use condoms or other protective barriers during sex. And don't forget the lube!
- **Practice Universal Precautions—**
Always use proper protective gear when dealing with blood or potentially contaminated body fluids.
- **Keep Personal Hygiene Items Personal—**
Don't share toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, or other items that might have blood on them.

Can You Get Hepatitis C from Re-Using Your Own Injection Equipment?

No, you can't give yourself a virus you don't already have. However, there are many bacterial infections you can get from dirty needles, so it's best to use brand new equipment every time.

I Can't Afford New Rigs. What Else Can I Do?

No. The next best is to use new needles for injecting drugs or tattooing and body piercing. Next best is triple rinsing with cold water, bleach, and cold water.

What's Your Hepatitis C Status?

The only way to know is to get tested. Ask your health care provider today!