

- Cover open cuts and sores with a sticking plaster or bandage.
- Clean all blood spills with paper towels. Then disinfect the area with a solution made up of 10 parts water and 1 part bleach. Dry the area with a clean paper towel.
- Put blood-stained items such as tampons in a plastic bag, tie it at the top and put it in an outside rubbish bin.
- Put used razors and needles in a special sharps bin. Keep it away from children.
- Tell your family doctor and dentist that you have hepatitis C.

You cannot spread hepatitis C by:

- Sneezing or coughing
- Kissing or hugging
- Breastfeeding
- Food or water
- Sharing dishes or glasses
- Casual contact (such as work).

You do not need to stay away from childcare, school, work or other activities because you have hepatitis C. If you need advice about hepatitis C and your work, your specialist will advise you.

### Is a vaccine available for hepatitis C?

No, there is currently no vaccine to protect against hepatitis C.

### Is there treatment for hepatitis C?

Yes. Treatment for hepatitis C has advanced significantly in recent years. New antiviral drugs called Direct Acting Antivirals have been developed. They are successful at clearing the virus from the blood of many of those who are treated. The HSE National Hepatitis C Treatment Programme has been established to ensure that persons living with Hepatitis C in Ireland are given access to appropriate treatment options.

## How can I get more information?

Get more information and leaflets from:

[www.hpsc.ie/HepatitisC](http://www.hpsc.ie/HepatitisC)

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)  
(Search for hepatitis C in the central box)

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)  
(Search for hepatitis C at top left)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
(Search for hepatitis C at top right.)

[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cFAQ.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cFAQ.htm)

Local drug services and support groups



Audience: Person recently diagnosed with Hepatitis C infection

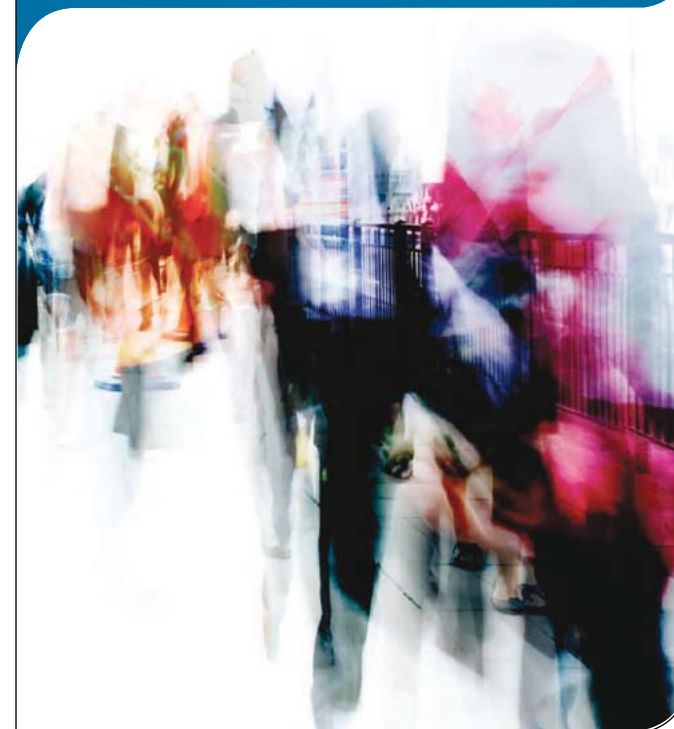
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# You have hepatitis C

What you need to know



## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a virus that can cause an infection and can damage your liver.

## What do the test results mean?

You will need a blood test to know if you have hepatitis C infection or not. This test is usually done in two stages:

1. First, your blood is tested for hepatitis C antibodies. If this is positive, then you have had hepatitis C at some time.
2. A second test is then needed to see if you are still infected.
  - If this is negative, then you have had hepatitis C infection in the past but you may no longer be infected
  - If the test is positive, you still have hepatitis C.

Knowing that you have hepatitis C is helpful, as there are many things that you can do to stay well. Your specialist can tell you what you need to do.

## How did I get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person. There are different ways that you may have got hepatitis C.

- Sharing injecting needles and equipment ('works') with someone who is infected is the most likely way to get hepatitis C. Most injecting drug users in Ireland have been infected with hepatitis C.
- You can also get hepatitis C by snorting cocaine
- In the past, some people got hepatitis C from transfusions of blood and blood products. Since 1991, blood donations in Ireland are checked for hepatitis C. So you can't get infected in this way any more.
- There is a small risk that infected mothers can pass hepatitis C on to their babies before or during birth. There is a 1 in 20 chance of this happening. This is more likely to happen if the mother is also infected with HIV.

There is also a small risk of getting hepatitis C by having sex. This is more likely to happen if the person with hepatitis C also has HIV.

Other less common ways of getting hepatitis C include:

- tattooing and body piercing without proper sterilisation
- needle-stick injuries in health-care workers
- sharing personal items such as toothbrushes and razors with an infected person
- Kidney dialysis and some surgical and dental treatments can lead to infection but this is very rare.

Your specialist may be able to tell you how you became infected.

However, some people may never find out how they became infected.

## How will hepatitis C affect me?

Most people have no symptoms when they first get hepatitis C.

A few people may lose their appetite, get a pain in their stomach, feel sick, vomit and get jaundice (yellow skin and eyes).

About one in four people with hepatitis C get fully better without any treatment.

However, most people will carry the virus for many years, or even for the rest of their lives. This is known as 'chronic' hepatitis C infection.

If you have a chronic infection, you may feel well for many years.

Without treatment for hepatitis C, about one in five people with chronic infection develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver after 20-30 years. They may then suffer liver failure or cancer of the liver.

## How can I keep healthy?

Your liver is essential to keep you healthy. You cannot live without it. It is very important in clearing alcohol, drugs and poisons from your body.

- Stop drinking alcohol. Alcohol can damage your liver.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B - if you have not already had these vaccines or had these diseases.
- Your doctor should send you to a specialist. Your specialist will check on your illness and let you know about treatment. Make sure you go to all your appointments.
- Check with your doctor before taking any new medicines, over-the-counter medicines or herbal medicines. Some of these could be bad for your liver.
- Ask your doctor if you need to get the flu vaccine.
- Find out about local and national groups that provide support for people with hepatitis C
- Look after yourself physically and mentally.

## How can I protect others?

If you have hepatitis C, you can pass the infection onto someone else. To prevent this, you need to make sure that your blood is not in contact with other people.

You should:

- Never ever share drug injecting equipment such as needles or syringes.
- Never let anybody else use your razors, toothbrushes or any personal items that might have your blood on them.
- There is a small risk that you can pass on hepatitis C during sex. Condoms reduce this risk. For more advice, talk to your doctor.
- If you are female, don't have sex during or straight after your period.