

Hepatitis C

What Is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a viral infection of the liver. The liver clears toxins from the body. This form of hepatitis ranges from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious lifelong disease.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis C?

After becoming infected with Hepatitis C, most people (about 80%) do not have any symptoms at all. The people who do show symptoms may have one or more of these present:

- Fever;
- Fatigue;
- Joint pain;
- Loss of appetite;
- Abdominal pain;
- Nausea/vomiting;
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and/or eyes);
- Clay or white coloured stool; and
- Tea coloured urine.

How Is Hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. Some ways this can happen are:

- Receiving contaminated blood transfusions, blood products and organ transplants;
- Needles or needle-stick injuries with contaminated syringes; and
- Injection drug use – sharing needles with a person who is infected.

Less often it can be spread through:

- Sexual contact with an infected person; or
- Sharing personal items (e.g. razors, etc.) that have come in contact with infected blood.

Hepatitis C is not spread through breast milk, food or water or by casual contact such as hugging, kissing and sharing food or drinks with an infected person.

What Special Precautions Are Required for Hepatitis C? What Do I Need to Know?

Together we can take steps to stop the spread of Hepatitis C to other patients in the hospital:

- Everyone who enters or leaves your room will clean their hands;

- Gloves, gowns and/or mask will be worn by staff who might come into contact with your body fluids; and
- Your room and the equipment used in your room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

What Is Good Hand Cleaning?

Our staff welcomes reminders to clean our hands. We invite you to ask anyone who enters your room to clean their hands before and after they touch you. Ask any staff member to show you good hand cleaning (20 seconds of soap and running water OR waterless alcohol hand rub for 20 seconds until hands are dry). Please clean your hands often and ask for help to clean your hands if needed:

- After using the bathroom;
- After blowing your nose;
- Before eating and drinking;
- Before and after you touch your dressing or wounds;
- When your hands are visibly dirty; and
- Before you leave your room.

Who Is at Risk?

People who may be at risk for infection are:

- Those who have received blood, blood products or organs before screening for Hepatitis C was in place, or where screening was not yet widespread;
- Injection drug users (current or former);
- Those who are on long-term hemodialysis;
- Healthcare workers (when safety-engineered needles are not used or disposed of properly);
- Those living with HIV; and
- Those with abnormal liver tests or liver disease.

What Is the Treatment for Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C does not always require treatment. There are six types of the hepatitis C virus with different responses to treatment. Careful screening is necessary before starting the treatment to determine what would work best for you.

Not everyone will be able to tolerate the medicines as they can make people feel unwell. This unfortunately means that many do not finish their treatment. While Hepatitis C is generally considered to be a curable disease, for many people this is not a reality. It is very important to finish all prescribed medications.

There is not currently available vaccination against Hepatitis C.

Questions? Infection Prevention and Control department 519-464-4400 Ext. 5253.

References:

Center for Disease Control: CDC Hepatitis C (Oct 2016)

WHO (World Health Organization) Hep C (July 2016)