

## Protect your liver from any further damage

- Stop drinking alcohol
- Stop using street drugs
- See your doctor on a regular basis  
(some persons have liver enzyme levels that are normal or vary over time, but they still have long-term (chronic) hepatitis C and may have long-term liver disease. Regular testing by a doctor of the ALT will help to follow and see if treatment is needed)
- Tell your doctor of any new medicines you plan to take. Even over-the-counter and herbal medications can damage your liver. Studies have also shown acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®) and similar drugs, Vitamin A, and iron to be possibly toxic for your liver
- Talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated against hepatitis A and B

**If you need this material in a different format, call (503) 731-4024**

## How can others reduce their risk of becoming infected with hepatitis C?

Currently there is no vaccine for Hepatitis C. In order to protect yourself from being infected you should avoid all contact with infected blood.

- Don't share needles, syringes, water, cotton or cookers for shooting drugs, medication or vitamins
- Don't share straws for snorting drugs
- Don't share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care products
- Make sure any tattoos or piercings are done by licensed professionals using sterile equipment and using clean latex gloves each time
- Limit sexual activity to one partner
- Use latex condoms every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex

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## Do You Have Hepatitis C?

**Hepatitis C is a disease of the liver caused by the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)**

**This virus is found in the blood of persons who have the disease**

**Almost 36,000 people in the U.S. are infected with hepatitis C every year**

**Nearly five million Americans are currently infected with hepatitis C**



Acute and Communicable Disease Program

## Test types for diagnosis

There are many blood tests that can be done to find out if you have HCV. Your doctor may order just one or several of these tests. The following are the types of tests your doctor may order:

### Anti-HCV (Antibody to HCV) Enzyme Immunoassay (EIA)

This test is usually done first. It should be tested again if positive.

### Anti-HCV Recombinant Immunoblot Assay (RIBA)

This is the additional test used to check a positive EIA test.

Anti-HCV does not tell whether the infection is new, long-term, or even if it is no longer present. Additional tests are required to learn whether the virus is still in your body.

### Generic polymerase chain reaction (PCR)

This test tells whether the virus is currently growing in your body. If it is growing, you are contagious, and can spread the disease to others.

### How long am I contagious?

Studies have yet to find out how long a person is able to spread hepatitis C to others, but it is possible that it is lifelong.

## Is it safe to have sex?

If you have only one long-time, steady sexual partner, there is a very low chance of spreading hepatitis C to your partner through sexual activity. To lower the risk you may want to use condoms. Your partner may also want to be tested.

The risk is higher if you have many sex partners, have other sexually transmitted diseases, and don't use a condom every time you have sex.

## What about pregnancy and breast feeding?

**Pregnancy:** Only 5 out of every 100 babies born to infected mothers become infected. The disease can spread to the baby at the time of birth. Most babies with hepatitis C show no signs of symptoms and do well during childhood. More studies are needed to learn the long-term effects on persons infected at birth. Children at risk should be tested after the age of 12 months because antibodies from the mother may last until this age.

**Breast Feeding:** There is no certain information that shows that breast-feeding spreads the disease. Mothers with cracked or bleeding nipples should stop breast feeding, and switch to bottle feeding.

## Long-term effects

Of every 100 persons infected with hepatitis C, 85 persons may get long-term infection, 70 persons may get chronic liver disease, and 15 persons may get liver cancer or cirrhosis.

## How do I know if I have liver damage?

The first step is to measure the level of ALT (alanine aminotransferase), a liver enzyme in the blood. A high ALT level is a sign of liver damage. If you have a high ALT level you should be checked further for long-term liver disease and possible treatment. These tests should be done by a doctor or nurse.

## What about treatment?

Acute infection can be treated with interferon. However, most people with acute infection don't even know they are infected. For patients with long-term (chronic) infection, interferon, along with ribavirin, has been successful 30 - 40% of the time.

**Currently there is NO vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C**