

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that affects the liver, causing it to become inflamed and not work as effectively in the body.

- Hepatitis C is a serious chronic illness that requires treatment.
- Hepatitis C is a curable disease for most.
- Hepatitis C testing is free at public testing clinics.
- You can get hepatitis C through contact with an infected person's blood.
- The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested.
- Untreated hepatitis C can cause serious health problems, such as liver disease.
- Hepatitis C will not go away in about 4 out of every 5 people who become infected – it will become chronic and will require treatment.



**Get the Facts
Get Tested
Get Support**

Signs and Symptoms

You can have hepatitis C and not have any signs or symptoms.

However, if symptoms exist they can include:

- Tiredness/fatigue
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain and discomfort
- Swelling of the abdomen
- Fever
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes)

Remember: These signs and symptoms can also be associated with other illnesses or infections.



Are you at risk?

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus. You can get it through blood-to-blood contact with an infected person's blood.

You can get it through:

- Blood to blood contact.
- Using/sharing drug injecting equipment (highest rate of transmission) and using/sharing contaminated snorting/smoking equipment.
- In rare cases, it can be transmitted through certain unprotected sexual practices if blood is present.
- Although rare, mother to child transmission is possible during childbirth. If you want to breastfeed, please discuss this with your doctor.
- Tattoos, body modifications and acupuncture if the tools used were not sterilised properly after being used on an infected person.



Prevention

Use safer drug-using practices, safer sex practices, and get tested.

Hepatitis C is a preventable illness.

You can avoid infection by:

- Safer drug using practices: avoid sharing any drug-using equipment.
- Do not share personal grooming items e.g. razors, tweezers, toothbrushes, nail scissors, with an infected person.
- If getting tattoos or body piercings ensure that the facility is licensed and the equipment used is sterilised.
- Use condoms for anal, vaginal and oral sex, and avoid sharing sex toys.
- Make informed decisions: talk to partner(s) about testing, drug-using practices and safer sex practices, and get informed about the risks.
- Use common sense when cleaning up spillages of human blood and body fluids – wear gloves for example. Take care to avoid needle stick injuries where needles and other skin piercing equipment are used.
- Get tested, and treated if required. Ask about free tests at public testing clinics.

DID YOU KNOW?

You are not immune to hepatitis C if you have had it before. You can be re-infected if you are exposed to it again



Who should go for a Hepatitis C test?

- Anyone who has any symptoms.
- Anyone who has ever injected drugs, including recreational steroid, tanning or botox injections.
- Anyone who has ever shared drug-using equipment including injecting, skin popping, smoking and snorting equipment.
- People with sexual partners who have hepatitis C.
- HIV-positive people.
- Children born to mothers who have hepatitis C.
- Health/social care workers that are exposed to infected blood or bodily fluids at work.
- Anyone who received a tattoo with needles that were not sterilised properly.
- Those travelling or residing in countries with high rates of infection.



DID YOU KNOW?
There is currently
no vaccine for
hepatitis C

Testing

Hepatitis tests are simple, painless, confidential and free at public STI Clinics.

Tests for hepatitis C are free at public STI testing Clinics. Ask for a free test if you think you have been at risk. For a list of clinics see www.hepinfo.ie.

The test for hepatitis C is two blood tests: one to check if a person has ever had hepatitis C, and a second to test if a person currently has hepatitis C. **It is very important that a person gets both tests.**

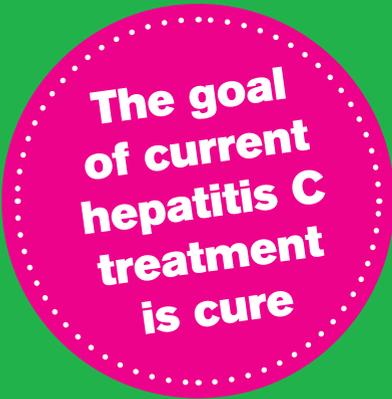
Treatment

There are two main phases of hepatitis C infection: acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term).

Treatment for hepatitis C is dependent on:

- Whether it is an acute or chronic infection.
- What genotype you are infected with; there are currently 6 different genotypes of hepatitis C. Genotypes 1 and 3 are the most common in Ireland.
- The progression of liver disease.

The current goal in hepatitis C treatment is to eradicate the virus and cure the patient. In 2015 cure rates are approaching 100% for certain patient types. New treatments are free from interferon leading to greatly improved side-effects. Treatment duration is currently 12 to 24 weeks.



**The goal
of current
hepatitis C
treatment
is cure**

For information and support

Visit: www.hepinfo.ie for information and support on hepatitis C and free testing.

Freephone the hepatitis helpline on **1800 459 459** for confidential support and information.

www.hepinfo.ie

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