

HEPATITIS C

What causes it?

Virus (HCV).

How do I get it?

- mainly spread by blood to blood contact such as shared needles for injection drug use, sharing other drug works like straws for drug snorting, or contaminated tattooing or body piercing tools
- an infected mother could infect her child, mainly by breastfeeding if the mother has cracked or bleeding nipples
- less commonly spread through sexual contact but can be spread when there are multiple partners, open lesions or sores, infected menstrual blood, or other contact with blood
- you may be at risk if you received blood transfusions or blood products before 1992 when testing of blood donations became universal

What are the symptoms?

You may feel well, have no symptoms and not even know you have hepatitis C for years. Or, you may develop symptoms 6 to 7 weeks after exposure to the virus such as:

- feeling tired or weak
- memory loss
- flu-like symptoms like muscle aches or fever
- loss of weight or appetite
- feeling sick to your stomach or throwing up
- rash or jaundice
- dark urine

It is estimated that only 30% of those infected know that they have the virus.

How do you test for it?

Blood test.

What treatment is available?

- antiviral drug treatment can reduce the chances of developing chronic hepatitis C
- your health care provider will advise you on how you can reduce the harmful effects of hepatitis C
- get plenty of sleep, eat a healthy diet, avoid any unnecessary medication (even over-the-counter drugs), cut down or stop smoking and don't drink alcohol

What complications can happen?

- about 80% of those infected develop chronic hepatitis and remain infectious to others
- can severely damage your liver: about 10 to 20% of chronic cases result in cirrhosis (serious liver damage) and 1 to 5% eventually develop liver cancer
- can cause death

What precautions should I take if I have hepatitis C?

If you are hepatitis C positive:

- avoid blood to blood contact:
- don't inject drugs or alcohol
- if you are an injection drug user, don't share needles or other drug works
- don't share personal items like toothbrushes or razors
- clean up blood spills with 1 part bleach to 9 parts water
- don't donate blood, organs or tissues

What else do I need to know?

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

Where can I get tested?

You can get tested at:

- YCDC (Yukon Communicable Disease Control)
#4 Hospital Road
667-8323 or 1-800-661-0408 ext. 8323
- Community Health Centre
- [Medical Clinics](#)