

# Focus on African Americans

## A Publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

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The information in this brochure is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical provider for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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Hepatitis C Support Project/ HCV Advocate Website

- Chronic hepatitis C infection (HCV) is almost twice as common in African Americans as in whites.
- Most African Americans with hepatitis C have a strain called genotype 1.
- The combination of an HCV protease inhibitor, pegylated interferon and ribavirin can cure up to about 60% (6 out of 10 people) of African Americans with genotype 1.

Hepatitis C is spread by direct blood-to-blood contact.

For more information about hepatitis C visit:  
The Hepatitis C Support Project  
[www.hcvadvocate.org](http://www.hcvadvocate.org)

# African Americans and Hepatitis C



## What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver, an organ that carries out over 500 functions that keep you healthy. Hepatitis may be caused by many things including viruses such as the hepatitis A virus (HAV), hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). There are six major strains of hepatitis C, known as genotypes, numbered 1 through 6.

Genotype 1 is the most common strain in the U.S. Hepatitis C can cause ongoing long term or chronic infection. Many people with chronic hepatitis C don't get sick or experience symptoms for many years. But they may develop liver damage during this period and may not even know it. That's why it's so important to get regular care from a doctor.

## What are the Symptoms?

Many people with HCV have no symptoms. The most common symptoms include feeling tired a lot (fatigue), having mild flu-like symptoms like muscle and joint pain, and stomach problems.

It is important for those with chronic hepatitis C to get regular care from a doctor.

## Getting Tested for Hepatitis C

*You may have hepatitis C if you have ever...*

- Shared equipment used for injecting drugs, hormones, steroids, vitamins (even just once)
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992
- Received blood clotting factors before 1987
- Been on hemodialysis (filtering the blood)
- Had a medical or dental procedure in certain foreign countries
- Had an unsafe (non-sterile) tattoo or piercing
- Had a needle-stick accident or blood exposure

*Hepatitis C is spread by direct blood-to-blood contact.*

## How Can I Prevent HCV Infection?

- Don't share needles or other works (cookers, cotton, water, ties, pipes, straws, etc.)
- Don't share personal items that may have blood on them (razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes or pierced earrings)
- Make sure tattoo or body piercing equipment is sterilized—only use new needles and separate ink pots
- Sexual transmission is uncommon; safer sex—using latex condoms—can reduce the risk
- Cover open sores and wounds

## What about Treatment?

If you think you have been infected with HCV, talk with your doctor or nurse about getting tested. If you already have HCV, your doctor or nurse will use different tests to manage hepatitis C and help you decide about treatment with HCV medications.

The latest treatment for hepatitis C is a combination of pegylated interferon and ribavirin. For people with HCV genotype 1, an HCV protease inhibitor is added to the combination.

## Treatment for HCV

- Pegylated Interferon – a medicine that is injected under the skin
- Ribavirin – a pill
- HCV Protease Inhibitor – a pill

Medicines to treat hepatitis C may cause many side effects that can interfere with your life during treatment. If you decide to undergo treatment it is important that you work closely with your doctor and nurse, and seek support from family and friends—this is the best way to increase the chances of curing hepatitis C.



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