

HEPATITIS C



Information on Testing

How is Hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through:

- **Injection drug use.** Most people become infected with Hepatitis C by sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs.
- **Past injection drug use.** It is possible to have gotten Hepatitis C from injecting drugs, even if just once or many years ago.
- **Blood transfusions and organ transplants.** Before widespread screening of the blood supply began in 1992, Hepatitis C was commonly spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants.

Although rare, sexual transmission of Hepatitis C is possible. Having a sexually transmitted disease or HIV, sex with multiple partners, or rough sex appears to increase a person's risk for Hepatitis C. Hepatitis C can also be spread when getting tattoos and body piercings in informal settings or with non-sterile instruments. Some people don't know how or when they got infected.

Who should get tested for Hepatitis C?

- Anyone born from 1945 through 1965
- Anyone who has received donated blood or organs before 1992
- Anyone who has injected drugs, even if it was just once or many years ago
- Anyone who has certain medical conditions including chronic liver disease and HIV or AIDS



Millions of Americans have Hepatitis C, but most don't know they are infected.

Why should I get tested for Hepatitis C?

- Millions of Americans have Hepatitis C, but most don't know it.
- Approximately 75% of people who get infected with Hepatitis C develop a chronic, or long-term infection.
- People with Hepatitis C often have no symptoms. Many people can live with an infection for up to 20 or 30 years without feeling sick.
- When or if symptoms do appear, they are often a sign of serious damage to the liver.
- Hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver cancer and the leading cause of liver transplants.
- New treatments are available for Hepatitis C that can get rid of the virus.



What to expect when getting tested for Hepatitis C

- The initial screening test is a blood test that looks for antibodies to the Hepatitis C virus. Sometimes this test is called a Hepatitis C Antibody Test.
- Ask when and how you will find out your results.
- The test results will take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks to come back, although new Rapid Antibody Tests are available in some settings.

What does the Hepatitis C Antibody Test mean?

If the test result is NON-REACTIVE/NEGATIVE

- A **non-reactive** or negative antibody test means that a person is not currently infected with the Hepatitis C virus.
- However, if a person has been recently exposed to the Hepatitis C virus, he or she will need to be tested again.

If the test result is REACTIVE/POSITIVE

- A **reactive** or positive antibody test means a person has been infected with the Hepatitis C virus at some point in time.
- Most people who get infected with the virus, stay infected with Hepatitis C. This is known as chronic Hepatitis C.
- However, some people are able to get rid of or “clear” the virus without treatment.
- Once people have been infected, they will always have antibodies in their blood. This is true if they have cleared the virus or still have the virus in their blood.

What to do if the Hepatitis C Antibody Test is reactive

- If the Hepatitis C Antibody Test is reactive, a person will need an additional, follow-up test to see if the Hepatitis C virus is currently in his or her blood.
- If the *additional blood test* is:
 - **Negative**—this means a person was infected with Hepatitis C, but the virus has now been cleared from his or her body.
 - **Positive**—this means a person has Hepatitis C.

If a person has a **reactive** antibody test and a **positive** follow-up test, he or she needs to talk to a doctor experienced in treating Hepatitis C.



The only way to know if you have Hepatitis C is to get tested. Early detection can save lives.

For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis.