



Hepatitis C: The Facts

Table of Contents

Complications of Hepatitis C	1
Treating Hepatitis C	1
Taking Care of You	2
If You Have Chronic Hepatitis C	3
Hepatitis C and Pregnancy	4
Understanding Hepatitis C Testing	5
Resources	6-9

The Facts

Hepatitis C (called Hep C for short) is a liver infection caused by a virus. Nearly 4 million people in the United States have been infected with Hep C. The information in this booklet is mainly intended for people with chronic hepatitis C. It can help you learn more about Hep C so you can make the best decisions for your health and avoid passing the virus to other people. The virus is spread primarily by exposure to human blood.



People are at higher risk of Hepatitis C and should be tested if they:

- Ever injected street drugs (even once)
- Received a blood transfusion, blood products, an organ transplant or a tissue transplant before 1992
- Were treated for clotting problems with a blood product before 1987
- Were ever on kidney dialysis
- Were ever a health care worker who had contact with hepatitis C-infected blood, especially through needle sticks
- Were born to a Hep C-infected mother

Lesser Risks Include:

- Having unprotected sex with a person infected with Hep C
- Sharing items with a Hep C-infected person that may contain blood, such as toothbrushes or razors

Hep C is serious for some people, but not for others. Some people with Hep C recover. Most people who get chronic (long-term) Hep C have some liver damage and may carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Certain people may develop cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver failure, which may take many years to develop. Other people with chronic (long-term) hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well, but should still see their doctor regularly.

COMPLICATIONS OF HEPATITIS C

There can be long-term effects from having Hep C. Of every 100 people infected with the hepatitis C virus, about:

- 75 to 85 people develop a long-term infection
- 70 people develop chronic liver disease
- 10-20 people develop cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) over a period of 20 to 30 years

Treating Hepatitis C

Treatment options are complex, and not everyone needs treatment. Two medicines, interferon and ribavirin, are used to treat people with chronic Hep C, but they don't work for everyone. The best way to find out if you need treatment is to discuss the options with a doctor who knows about Hep C (such as a gastroenterologist or hepatologist).

Taking Care of YOU

There are many things you can do to help yourself stay healthy if you have Hep C.

- **Do not drink alcohol.** This is very important. Alcohol can damage your liver.
- **Eat healthy and maintain a healthy weight.** Eat at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables a day.
- **Rest.** Try to get a full night's sleep every night and take naps on days you feel really tired. When your body is well rested, it will help you stay healthy.
- **Exercise.** Exercise can help you release stress, maintain a healthy weight, and get the energy you need. Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity (such as a brisk walk) at least 5 days a week. If you are not used to exercising, start slowly. Even a small amount of exercise can help you feel healthier. Your doctor can help you decide what's right for you. Remember, you should check with your doctor before starting any form of exercise.
- **Talk about your feelings.** Finding out that you have Hep C can be overwhelming. You may feel scared, sad, angry, confused, and upset. These feelings are normal and they can get better with time. Talking about your feelings and taking steps to take care of yourself and stay healthy can help. However, if your feelings don't get better or if they stop you from doing your daily activities, you may be having symptoms of depression. Talk to your doctor and people close to you so you can get the support and help you may need.
- **Get help if you have depression or a drug or alcohol problem.** You can get help. LIFENET is free and available 24 hours/7days a week. Call 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638)

Get the Right Medical Care

- See a doctor who knows about Hep C. People with chronic Hep C need regular check-ups.
- Talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, separate infections that can damage your liver. The vaccines are safe and effective, and can help you stay healthy.
- Have your liver checked once or twice a year. Certain blood tests need to be performed to monitor your liver's health.
- Check with your doctor before taking any medicines. Even some over-the-counter and herbal medicines can injure your liver.

If you have chronic Hep C and your liver disease progresses, here are some extra precautions you should take:

- Get a flu vaccine every year.
- Get a pneumonia vaccine.
- Don't eat raw oysters as they may carry bacteria that can cause an infection in people with liver disease.

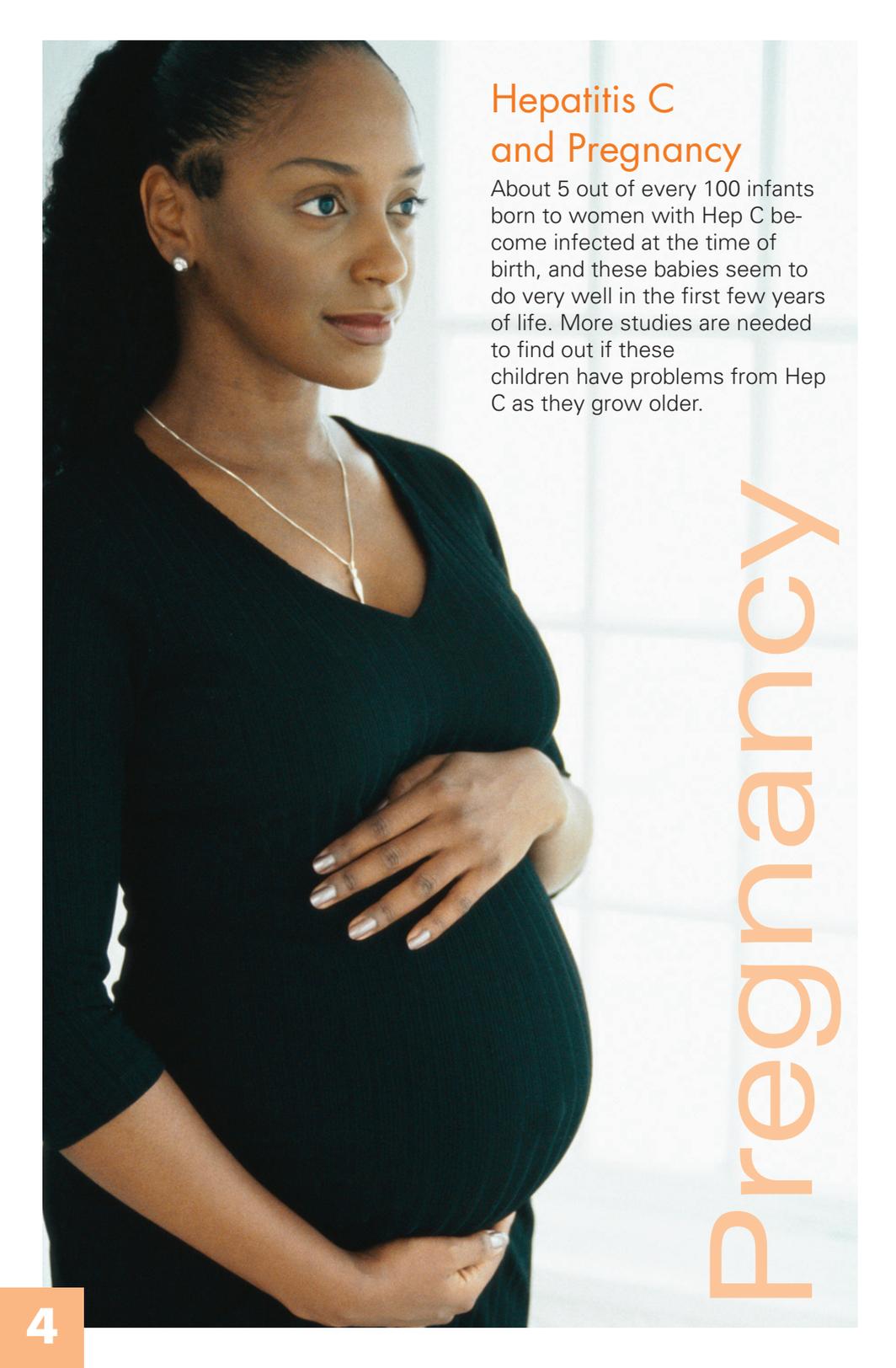
IF YOU HAVE CHRONIC HEPATITIS C

Avoid spreading Hep C to others

- If you inject street drugs, never share needles, syringes, cotton, cups, ties, water, or cookers. This can also prevent other infections.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files, clippers, nail scissors, washcloths, or anything that may have come in contact with your blood or bodily fluids.
- Cover all cuts and open sores with bandages.
- Throw away used bandages or menstrual pads in a plastic bag so others will not be exposed to your blood.
- Clean up any blood spills with a bleach solution (1 part regular household bleach to 10 parts water).
- Wash your hands well after touching your blood or body fluids.
- Tell your doctors, dentists, and other health care providers that you are infected with Hep C.
- Use condoms when you have sex. The risk of sexual transmission of hepatitis C is not fully understood, but it appears to be low. However, the risk may be greater for people with more than 1 sexual partner, people who have genital sores or lesions, and for people who engage in sexual activities (i.e., anal sex) where blood is more likely to be present.

You **cannot** spread Hep C by sneezing, coughing, kissing or hugging, or sharing eating utensils, drinking glasses, food or water. You cannot spread it by casual contact, such as shaking hands, or talking. People with Hep C should not be excluded from work, school, play, child care, or other settings.

Avoid Spreading



Hepatitis C and Pregnancy

About 5 out of every 100 infants born to women with Hep C become infected at the time of birth, and these babies seem to do very well in the first few years of life. More studies are needed to find out if these children have problems from Hep C as they grow older.

Pregnancy

Understanding Hepatitis C Testing

There are several blood tests that can be done to find out if you have been infected with Hep C. A preliminary test may be positive, meaning it shows you have Hep C antibody, but another type of test is needed to confirm whether you are infected with Hep C. Your doctor may order a combination of tests.

Common Hepatitis C tests

Antibody tests

If you are exposed to Hep C, your body makes antibodies that are present when you are tested. These tests for Hep C antibody do not indicate whether the infection is new (acute), chronic (long-term), or if you had Hep C in the past but it is no longer present. There are 2 tests for Hep C antibody: **EIA (enzyme immunoassay)** and **RIBA (Recombinant immunoblot assay)**.

PCR tests

A PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test looks for the Hep C virus in the blood. A positive PCR test means that you have Hep C. PCR can also be used to measure **how much** Hep C virus there is in the blood, and this can be used to measure your response to treatment.

Hepatitis C genotype test

The Hep C genotype test indicates the strain of the virus and is used in making decisions about treatment.

Tests to Evaluate Your Liver

Liver Function Tests (LFTs)

These blood tests show how your liver is working. The most important tests are:

- Alanine Aminotransferase (ALT), also called SGPT
- Aspartate Aminotransferase (AST), also called SGOT

These 2 enzymes, if elevated, show liver damage, and are included in the regular monitoring of all chronic hepatitis C patients.

Alkaline phosphatase (Alk. Phos.): An enzyme that indicates obstruction of the biliary (bile) system, either within the liver or in the larger bile channels outside the liver.

Liver Biopsy: The removal of a small piece of tissue from the liver using a special needle. The tissue is examined under a microscope to look for liver damage.

Ultrasound or Sonogram: A picture that shows if there are changes in the shape of the liver. This is used to find tumors in the liver.

Alpha-fetoprotein (AFP): Increased levels may indicate liver cancer.

RESOURCES

English

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Call 311 or visit: Health Topics A–Z www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cd/cdhepc.shtml

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

1-800-443-7232 or www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

American Liver Foundation:

1-800-465-4837 or www.liverfoundation.org

Hepatitis Foundation International:

1-800-891-0707 or www.hepfi.org

National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse:

http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepc_ez/

Hepatitis C Support Information: Hepatitis C Support Project:

www.hcvadvocate.org

Hepatitis C Information for People with HIV AIDS Treatment Data Network:

212-260-8868 or 1-800-734-7104 (New York State only)

www.aegis.com/factsheets/network/simple/hepc.html

www.aegis.com/factsheets/network/simple/coinf.html

Veterans Affairs – National Hepatitis C Program

www.hepatitis.va.gov

Free NYC Condoms

Call 311



Harm Reduction Coalition:

Hepatitis C Harm Reduction Project: www.harmreduction.org

Needle Exchange Programs in NYC: http://hepcproject.typepad.com/hepc_c_project/2005/09/needle_exchange.html

Spanish/Español

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

1-888-246-2857 / 1-888-443-7232

www.cdc.gov/spanish/enfermedades/hepatitis/

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse

1-800-891-5389

http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/spanish/pubs/hepc_ez/index.htm

Latino Organization for Liver Awareness (LOLA)

1-888-367-LOLA (5652) 718-892-8697

www.lola-national.org

Chinese/ 中文

Department of Human Services, Victoria, Australia

Hepatitis Fact Sheet in Chinese

www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/downloads/languages/hepc_facts_chinese.pdf

Russian/Русский

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hepatitis Fact Sheet in Russian:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/resource/PDFs/hcv_prev_ru.pdf

For Information on Drug/Alcohol Abuse Treatment

LIFENET:

1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638)

Spanish/ Español: 1-877-AYUDESE (1-877-298-3373)

Asian languages: 1-877-990-8585

New York State Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services:

1-800-522-5353

If You Don't Have Health Insurance, Check for Free or Low-cost Insurance:

Family Health Plus:

1-877-9FHPLUS (1-877-934-7587)

www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/fhplus/index.htm

Healthy NY:

1-866-HealthyNY (1-866-432-5849)

www.HealthyNY.com

New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation

Please call 311 for hours and directions to these facilities

If you do not already have a doctor to take care of your hepatitis, you can go to any HHC hospital; these are the ones with clinics that specialize in the care of patients with hepatitis.

Bellevue Hospital Center

462 First Avenue
New York, New York 10016

Elmhurst Hospital Center

79-01 Broadway
Elmhurst, New York 11373

Harlem Hospital Center

506 Lenox Avenue
New York, New York 10037

Kings County Hospital Center

470 Clarkson Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11203

Metropolitan Hospital Center

1901 First Avenue
New York, New York 10029

Vaccination

- Vaccination against hepatitis A and B is recommended for people with hepatitis C.
- The vaccines are safe, effective, and can protect your liver from further damage.

Get the vaccines from your regular health care provider, or you can visit one of the clinics listed below:

NYC DOHMH Confidential No Cost Clinics

Please call 311 for hours and directions to these facilities

These clinics also provide:

- Pap tests
- Confidential and anonymous HIV counseling and testing
- Referrals as needed
- Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) diagnosis and treatment

Central Harlem

2238 Fifth Avenue (137th Street)
New York, NY 10037

East Harlem

158 East 115th Street
(off Lexington Avenue)
New York, NY 10029

Chelsea

303 Ninth Avenue (at 28th Street)
New York, NY 10001

Riverside

160 West 100th Street
(between Columbus/Amsterdam)
New York, NY 10025

Morrisania

1309 Fulton Avenue
(E 169th Street off 3rd Ave)
Bronx, NY 10456

Richmond

51 Stuyvesant Place (Wall Street)
Staten Island, NY 10301

Bushwick Clinic

335 Central Avenue
(between Linden St and Grove St)
Brooklyn, NY 11221

Fort Greene

295 Flatbush Ave. Extension, 2nd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Corona

34-33 Junction Blvd.
(at Roosevelt/Northern)
Jackson Heights, NY 11372

Jamaica

90-37 Parsons Blvd. 1st Floor
(off Jamaica Ave.)
Jamaica, NY 11432

Rockaway

67-19 Rockaway Beach Blvd.
(Addabbo Health Center)
Queens, NY 11692



Call 311 to receive a copy of this booklet