

Hepatitis C Basics

What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver that is most often caused by a virus, such as the Hepatitis C virus (also known as HCV or Hep C).

Can the immune system fight off Hepatitis C?

A certain percentage of people can actually clear the Hepatitis C virus, but most people who are infected with Hepatitis C develop a long-term chronic infection.

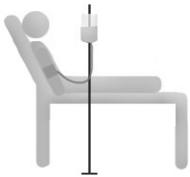
How is Hepatitis C transmitted? Primarily through blood-to-blood transfer, such as:



Injection Drug Use with shared equipment, including needles, syringes, cottons, filters, cookers, spoons, and rinse water.



Non-Professional Tattoos or Piercings with shared needles or ink, especially in a jail/prison setting where Hepatitis C is prevalent and infection control practices are not ideal.



Receiving Blood Products or Organ Transplants before 1992 when sensitive tests were first used for blood/organ screening. Infection from blood/organs is very rare now.



Snorting Drugs with a Shared Nasal Delivery Tool (AKA straw/tooter) because snorting drugs irritates the nasal canal, which can cause inflammation and bleeding. This irritation may create a pathway for blood-to-blood transfer.



Sharing Personal Hygiene Items Contaminated with Infectious Blood, such as razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, scissors, etc.



Occupational Exposure, such as a needle-stick injury or blood splash to the eyes, nose, mouth, or an open wound.



Unprotected Sexual Contact where Bleeding and/or Rectal Fluid is Present,* such as sex with a person who is menstruating (period sex) or rough sex that causes tearing or bleeding, especially anal sex.

**Note: The science is still emerging on sexual risk for Hepatitis C. Visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm for the latest information.*



Pregnancy & Childbirth

Mother-to-baby transmission is rare, but it can occur. The risk is greater if the mother also has HIV. Breastfeeding is not considered a transmission route unless infected blood is present on or around the nipple due to chafing or cracking.

Can Hepatitis C be spread by sexual contact?

Yes, but the risk of transmission from sexual contact is believed to be low. The risk *increases* for those who have multiple sex partners, have a sexually transmitted disease (STD), engage in rough sex or menstrual period sex, or are infected with HIV, so using a condom during sex is recommended. More research is needed to better understand how and when Hepatitis C can be spread through sexual contact. Visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm for the latest updates.

Is Hepatitis C transmitted through casual contact?

No. Hepatitis C is primarily spread through blood-to-blood contact, so the following pose no known risk for Hepatitis C transmission:

- Air or Water
- Animals or Insects, including Mosquitos, Fleas, Ticks, or Bed Bugs
- Saliva, Tears, or Sweat (unless infected blood is present)
- Nasal Fluid, Vomit, Urine, or Feces (unless infected blood or infected rectal fluid is present)
- Breastmilk (unless infected blood is present on/around the nipple due to chafing/cracking)
- Casual Contact, such as Shaking Hands, Kissing, Hugging, or Sharing Dishes, Utensils, or Glasses (unless infected blood is present)
- Drinking Fountains or Toilet Seats

How can Hepatitis C transmission be prevented?

- **Avoid Sharing Any Injection Drug Equipment—**
Always try to use brand new rigs and don't share cookers, spoons, cottons, and/or rinse water.
- **Use Reputable Tattoo & Piercing Shops—**
Make sure you get your body art from professionals who know about disease prevention.
- **Avoid Sharing Straws for Snorting Drugs—**
Carry your own straw or tooter and don't share it with others.
- **Keep Personal Hygiene Items Personal—**
Don't share toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, or other items that might have blood on them.
- **Practice Universal Precautions—**
Always use proper protective gear when dealing with blood and/or body fluids. View all blood and body fluids as potentially infectious.
- **Practice Safer Sex—**
Always use condoms or other protective barriers during sex. And don't forget the lube!

Can a person get Hepatitis C from re-using their own injection equipment?

No, you can't give yourself a virus you don't already have. However, there are many bacterial infections you can get from dirty needles, so it's best to use brand new equipment every time. If you can't get new injection gear, triple rinse—cold water, then bleach, then cold water again.

What's your Hepatitis C status?

Most people with Hepatitis C don't even realize they have it. The only way to know your status is to get tested. Fast, FREE, confidential Hepatitis C testing is available at

Northland Cares, (928) 776-4612

Yavapai County Community Health Services, (928) 442-5563

Call for an appointment today! Walk-ins welcome at Northland Cares.