

## What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis can be caused by a number of things, including alcohol, chemicals, drugs and infection by viruses.

## What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a type of hepatitis caused by a virus. Many people have no symptoms. Some people may feel tired, have mild abdominal discomfort, or feel nauseous..

## What are the long-term effects of Hepatitis C?

People infected with the hepatitis C virus will either:

- remove the virus from their body, or
- develop chronic hepatitis with or without symptoms.

About 60% of people with hepatitis C will develop chronic hepatitis. Some people with chronic hepatitis will develop cirrhosis of the liver and/or liver cancer.

## How soon after infection can Hepatitis C be diagnosed?

Some people may develop symptoms of acute hepatitis a few weeks after becoming infected. Others may not develop symptoms for many years after becoming infected. It takes an average of 22 weeks from the time of infection with the virus until a blood test can detect evidence of infection. However, it may take as little as 2 weeks or as long as 26 weeks.

## How long is a person infectious?

A person is infectious a few weeks before there is evidence of infection from a blood test. Some people will continue to be infectious for an indefinite period.

## How is Hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C, hepatitis B and hepatitis A are caused by different types of virus. Infection with the hepatitis C virus does not give any protection against hepatitis B and hepatitis A.

## Who is at risk of getting Hepatitis C?

People at increased risk of getting hepatitis C include:

- people who have ever injected drugs
- haemodialysis patients
- people who received blood transfusions before February 1990
- health care workers with occupational exposure to blood.

However, about 40% of people with hepatitis C have no obvious risk factor.

## What can be done to avoid infecting others?

People with hepatitis C should:

- tell their health care worker (including doctor and dentist) that they have hepatitis C
- wipe up blood spills in the home with household detergent
- cover any cut or wound with a dressing
- place any bloodstained item, such as a sanitary napkin or a tissue, in a plastic bag before putting it in the garbage
- practise safe sex; in particular use condoms for vaginal or anal intercourse.

People with hepatitis C should not:

- share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors and combs
- donate blood
- share needles/syringes.

### Should people with Hepatitis C be excluded from work?

People with hepatitis C rarely need to be excluded from work.

If you have further questions consult your doctor or telephone your local Public Health Unit – see under NSW Government at the front of the White Pages phone book.

Public Health Units in NSW:

Central Coast, Ourimbah	(02) 4349 4845
Central Sydney, Camperdown	(02) 9515 9420
Far West NSW, Broken Hill	(08) 8080 1499
Greater Southern, Albury	(02) 6080 8900
Greater Western/Macquarie, Dubbo	(02) 6841 5569
Bathurst	(02) 6339 5601
Hunter, Wallsend	(02) 4924 6477
Illawarra	(02) 4221 6700
Mid North Coast, Port Macquarie	(02) 6588 2750
New England, Tamworth	(02) 6767 8630
North Coast, Lismore	(02) 6620 7500
Northern Sydney, Hornsby	(02) 9477 9400
South Eastern Sydney, Randwick	(02) 9382 8333
South West Camperdown	(02) 9515 9420
Southern NSW, Queanbeyan	(02) 6124 9942
Sydney West, Penrith	(02) 4734 2022
Western Sydney, North Parramatta	(02) 9840 3603

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