



PHILLY HEPATITIS

ANSWERS ABOUT HEPATITIS



Department of
Public Health
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
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The information presented in this booklet is only intended to educate, and does not replace medical advice. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health neither endorses nor opposes any treatment option presented within, and encourages you to discuss all treatment options with your healthcare provider. The resources noted are not the most comprehensive listing, but rather a sample of available options.

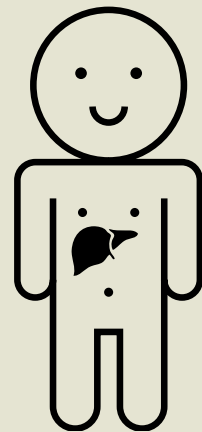
WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C (or hep C) is a virus that infects the liver. It is the most common infection in the U.S. that is spread by blood. An estimated 2.5% of Philadelphians are living with hep C - this equals about **45,000 people**, enough to fill our baseball stadium! The virus is spread when the blood of an infected person enters the bloodstream of someone who is not infected. People with hep C do not always have symptoms, so getting tested is important to preventing liver disease.

HEPATITIS C AND YOUR LIVER

The liver has many important jobs that your body relies on to stay alive. Your liver cleans your blood, helps digest food, and helps the body store and use energy. Your life depends on your liver! If you test positive for hep C, it is important to get treatment to prevent the virus from causing scarring and other damage that can make your liver stop working. Good news: there are medications that can **CURE** the virus in most people living with hep C!



HEPATITIS C HAS TWO PHASES

There are two phases of a hepatitis C infection. Your body reacts to each phase in different ways.

1.

Acute

Acute hepatitis C is the infection that occurs in the first 6 months after transmission. 3 out of 10 adults who are exposed to hepatitis C will “clear” the virus, which means the body has fought off, or cured, the virus on its own.

2.

Chronic

For 7 of 10 adults who are exposed to hep C, the virus will stay in their body as a long-term infection. Chronic hep C can cause severe liver damage. Fortunately, medication can now **cure** most people of the hep C virus!

**HOW DO
PEOPLE GET
INFECTED
WITH
HEPATITIS C?**

BLOOD-TO-BLOOD

The hepatitis C virus is spread by blood-to-blood contact. To get hep C, the blood of an infected person has to enter the blood of someone who is not infected. Hep C is **NOT** spread by sneezing, coughing, kissing, hugging, or sharing utensils, food, or water. You cannot get it by casual contact, such as shaking hands or talking.

People are at increased risk for hepatitis C and should be tested if they:

- Ever shared injection drug equipment or tools, even if it was just one time
- Received a tattoo or body piercing in a non-licensed setting like at a house party or in jail
- Have ever been on kidney dialysis
- Received a blood transfusion or any blood products before 1992, or clotting factors before 1987
- Were ever a healthcare worker who might have had contact with hep C infected blood
- Have had multiple sexual partners or have had rough and/or unprotected sex with a hep C infected partner

BABY BOOMERS

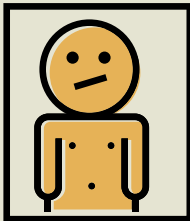
Baby Boomers are five times more likely to have hep C than any other age group. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that anyone born between **1945 and 1965** be screened for hep C. **If you are in this age group, talk to your doctor about one-time testing**, even if you do not think you are at risk.

HOW DOES HEPATITIS C AFFECT MY BODY?

ACUTE INFECTION

The acute stage of hep C happens right after a person is exposed to the virus. **Most people will have NO symptoms** to let them know they are sick.

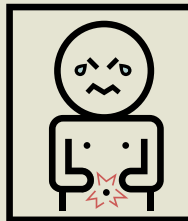
When people do have symptoms, they occur 2 weeks to 6 months after exposure (known as the “incubation period”) and are usually mild and flu-like. Symptoms can include:



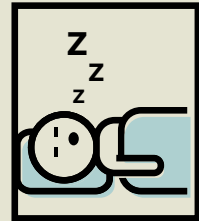
Yellowing of Skin or Eyes (Jaundice)



Fever



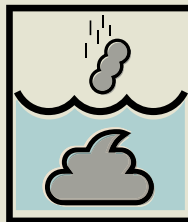
Abdominal Pain



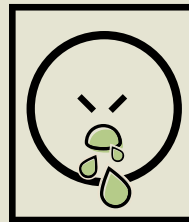
Always Tired



Dark Urine (Pee)



Grey Feces (Poop)



Nausea or Vomiting

CHRONIC INFECTION

While most people with chronic hep C never show symptoms, the disease can have long-term effects. Without treatment, hepatitis C can cause liver damage including cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver failure, and liver cancer. If you have a chronic infection you will probably not notice any obvious symptoms until your immune system is very weak or if your liver is starting to fail.

Do not wait until you feel sick to get tested or get care!

Hepatitis C is called a **silent killer** because if you wait for symptoms to show up, it may be too late to reverse the damage that has been done to your liver. Thankfully severe illness can be prevented.

If you think you have been exposed to hepatitis C, find a doctor and get tested as soon as possible. If you test positive for hep C, **there are medications that can CURE the virus.**

DOES HEPATITIS C AFFECT PREGNANCY?

FROM MOTHER TO CHILD

There is a 5-10% chance that hepatitis C will be spread from an infected mother to baby during pregnancy or childbirth. If your baby becomes infected with hepatitis C, there is a risk that he or she could develop liver damage if they are not tested and treated.

If you are pregnant and have hep C, inform your doctor and your child's doctor. Your child's pediatrician should test them for hep C when he or she is 18 months or older. If your child is hep C positive, they will be eligible for treatment beginning at 3 years of age, and can be cured of their infection.

Need Assistance?

If you are pregnant and tested positive for hepatitis C, you can receive help from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health's Perinatal Hepatitis C Program. For more information call 215-685-6493.

HOW DO I GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C?

TWO BLOOD TESTS

To find out if you have hepatitis C, you will need to get two different blood tests:

- **Antibody Test** - The antibody test is considered a “screening” test. A positive antibody test means you have been **exposed** to the hep C virus. This test cannot tell you if the infection is new (acute), chronic (long term), or if the infection is gone because your body cured the virus on its own.
- **RNA Test** - The RNA test (also known as PCR test) is considered a “confirmatory” test. This test checks to see if the hep C virus is still in your blood. A positive RNA test means you have chronic hep C. The test can also tell your viral load, (how much virus is in your blood) which is important for planning treatment.

Need a Hepatitis C Test?

Talk to your doctor or visit www.phillyhepatitis.org for testing locations.

HOW DO I GET TREATED FOR HEPATITIS C?

SEE A SPECIALIST AND GET CURED!

There are medications that can **CURE** the virus in most people in less than 24 weeks. The new treatments have very few side effects and no longer require Interferon shots. To get treatment you need to see your primary care provider and get a referral to see a specialist (usually a hepatologist, gastroenterologist, or infectious disease clinician). A specialist can tell you what treatment options are available and best for you.

AVOID RE-INFECTION!

It is possible to be re-infected with hep C even if your body cleared a previous infection or if you were cured through medication. Since you cannot get vaccinated against hep C, it is important to follow the steps on page 13 to avoid getting hepatitis C again.

HOW DO I GET TREATMENT IF I DON'T HAVE INSURANCE?

IF YOU ARE UNINSURED

To get tested or treated for hepatitis C, you will need to sign up for insurance or get health care coverage. Visit www.pahealthoptions.com or call 877-881-6388 to learn about the best choices for you.

To find out if you qualify for Medical Assistance (Medicaid) contact the PA Department of Human Services (DHS) at 866-550-4355 or visit www.compass.state.pa.us.

PHILADELPHIA HEALTH CENTERS

City Health Centers (listed on page 17) and community clinics (also called FQHCs) will treat uninsured people and have staff that can help you apply for insurance. For help finding a clinic call 3-1-1 or visit www.phillyhepatitis.org.

HOW DO I AVOID SPREADING HEPATITIS C TO OTHERS?

BE CAREFUL WITH BLOOD

Hepatitis C is spread through contact with infected blood. Take these steps to avoid spreading hepatitis C to others:

- Never share needles, syringes, cottons, cookers, water, or pipes if you inject or smoke street drugs (this can also prevent other infections)
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, nail files, clippers, or other personal care items that may come into contact with blood
- Cover all cuts and open sores with clean bandages
- Clean up any blood spills with bleach solution (one part household bleach to 10 parts water)
- Use condoms when you have sex. The risk of getting hep C through sex is greater for people with more than one sexual partner, people who have genital sores, people with STDs (like HIV), and for people who engage in sexual activities where blood is more likely to be present (such as anal sex).

Use Clean Works

If you use drugs, Prevention Point Philadelphia offers clean syringes, works, and other support services at their drop-in center and several mobile sites. Visit them at 2913-15 Kensington Ave, call 215-634-5272 or visit www.ppponline.org to learn more.

**HOW DO I
STAY HEALTHY
WHILE LIVING
WITH
HEPATITIS C?**

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!

There are important things you can do to stay healthy while living with hepatitis C:

- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B. They are separate infections that can also damage your liver. The vaccine is given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. These shots are safe and effective.
- Schedule regular check-ups with your hepatitis specialist. While you wait to start treatment, they will monitor your health and check to see if the disease is damaging your liver.
- Some medicines can speed up liver damage if you have hep C. Talk to your health care provider if you take over the counter and/or prescriptions drugs to see if they will affect your liver.
- Avoid alcohol. Since alcohol can cause hepatitis C to damage your liver at a faster rate, you should drink less alcohol, or not drink it at all.
- Exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet.
- Talk to someone - finding out you have hepatitis C can be overwhelming. You may feel sad, angry, scared, or confused. Talking about your feelings to people close to you can help. Let your doctor know if you need more support.

Feeling Depressed?

Immediate help is available if you are depressed, suicidal, or want help quitting drugs and/or alcohol. Call the Department of Behavioral Health's hotline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 215-686-4420.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PHILLY HEPATITIS

www.phillyhepatitis.org

Information and resources on testing, treatment, and support options within Philadelphia.

HEPATITIS C ALLIES OF PHILADELPHIA (HEPCAP)

www.hepcap.org

HepCAP is the city's coalition dedicated to increasing hep C awareness and improving local hep C prevention, testing, and treatment services. Meetings are held bimonthly - everyone is welcome!

HCV ADVOCATE

www.hcvadvocate.org

Up-to-date information and patient resources including treatment guides, fact sheets, newsletters and more.

HELP-4-HEP

www.help4hep.org or 877-435-7443

A peer-to-peer helpline for people trying to locate hep C services, get hep C questions answered, or just need support.

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/C/index.htm

PHILADELPHIA HEALTH CENTERS

HEALTH CENTER 1

500 S. Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19146
215-685-6570

(Sexual Health &
Family Planning Only)

HEALTH CENTER 2

Constitution Health Plaza
1930 S. Broad Street, Unit #14
Philadelphia, PA 19145
215-685-1803

HEALTH CENTER 3

555 S. 43rd Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215-685-7504

HEALTH CENTER 4

4400 Haverford Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215-685-7601

HEALTH CENTER 5

1900 N. 20th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19121
215-685-2933

HEALTH CENTER 6

301 W. Girard Street
Philadelphia, PA 19123
215-685-3803

HEALTH CENTER 9

131 E. Chelton Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19144
215-685-5701

HEALTH CENTER 10

2230 Cottman Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19149
215-685-0639

STRAWBERRY MANSION HEALTH CENTER

2840 Dauphin Street
Philadelphia, PA 19132
215-685-2401



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For more information about hepatitis C
or for help finding testing and support services,
visit www.phillyhepatitis.org



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