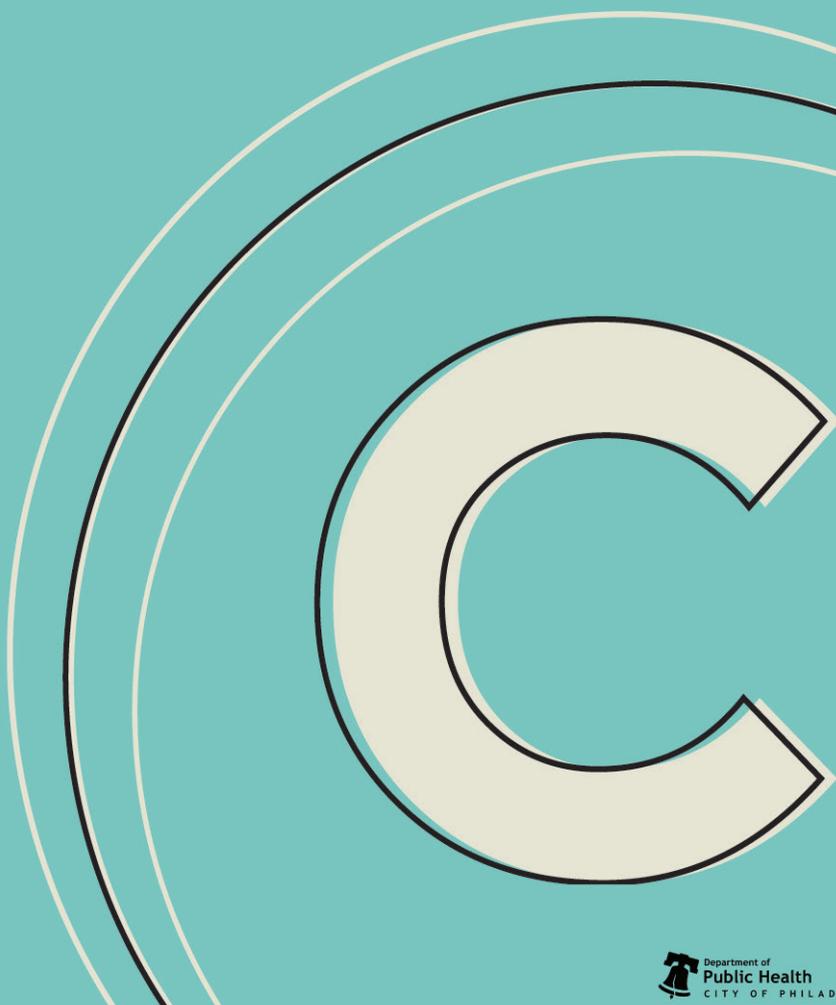




PHILLY HEPATITIS

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# ANSWERS ABOUT HEPATITIS



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The information presented in this booklet is 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

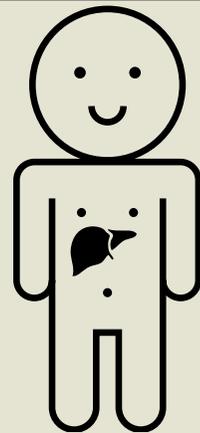
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Hepatitis C (or hep C) is a virus that infects the liver. It is the most common infection in the U.S. that is spread by blood. An estimated 3.5% of Philadelphians are living with hep C - this equals about **55,000 people**, more than enough to fill our baseball stadium! The virus is spread when the blood of someone living with hep C enters the bloodstream of someone who is not. People with hep C do not always have symptoms, so getting tested is important to prevent liver disease and spreading to others.

## HEPATITIS C AND YOUR LIVER

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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

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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 year 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

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The hepatitis C virus is spread by blood-to-blood contact. To get hep C, the blood of someone living with hep C has to enter the bloodstream of someone who does not have it. 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. Hep C can live outside the body in blood for up to 6 weeks.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that everyone 18 years and older get a one-time test for hep C. Certain people are at an increased risk of contracting hep C if they are or have ever:

- Shared injection drug equipment or tools
- Received a tattoo or body piercing at an unlicensed facility like a jail
- Been incarcerated
- Born to a person who had hep C
- Been on kidney dialysis
- Received a blood transfusion, organ transplant, or any blood products before 1992, or clotting factors before 1987
- Been in contact with hep C infected blood
- Baby Boomers born between 1945 and 1965
- Had unprotected sex with potential blood exchange with someone living with hep C

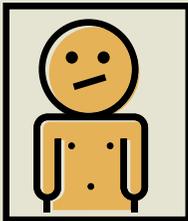
# HOW DOES HEPATITIS C AFFECT MY BODY?

## ACUTE INFECTION

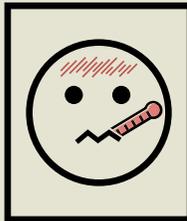
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The acute stage of hep C happens right after a person is exposed to the virus. **Most people will have NO symptoms** to let them know they are sick.

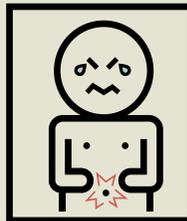
When people do have symptoms, they occur 2 weeks to 6 months after exposure (known as the “incubation period”) and are usually mild and flu-like. Symptoms can include:



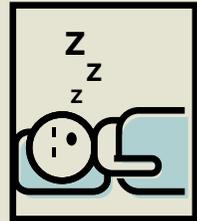
Yellowing of  
Skin or Eyes  
(Jaundice)



Fever



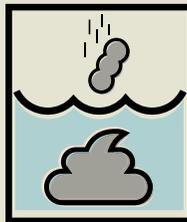
Abdominal  
Pain



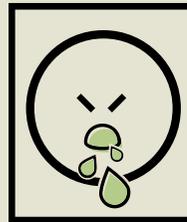
Always Tired



Dark Urine  
(Pee)



Grey Feces  
(Poop)



Nausea or  
Vomiting

# CHRONIC INFECTION

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While most people with chronic hep C never show symptoms, the disease can have long-term effects. Without treatment, hep 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 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?

## **PREGNANT PARENT-TO-INFANT**

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There is a 5-10% chance that hepatitis C will be spread from an infected pregnant parent to baby during pregnancy or childbirth. If your baby becomes infected with hepatitis C, there is a risk that they 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 they are 2 months or older. If your child is hep C positive, treatment is available and they 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

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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 active hep C virus. 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](http://www.phillyhepatitis.org) for testing locations.

# HOW DO I GET TREATED FOR HEPATITIS C?

## **SEE A DOCTOR AND GET CURED**

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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 who will either treat you or refer you to a specialist (usually a hepatologist, gastroenterologist, or infectious disease clinician) who can treat you.

Visit [www.phillyhepatitis.org](http://www.phillyhepatitis.org) to find a doctor.

## **AVOID RE-INFECTION**

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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**

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To get tested or treated for hepatitis C, you will need to sign up for insurance or get health care coverage. Visit [www.insurance.pa.gov](http://www.insurance.pa.gov) 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](http://www.compass.state.pa.us).

## **PHILADELPHIA HEALTH CENTERS**

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City Health Centers (listed on page 17) and community clinics (also called FQHCs) will care for 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](http://www.phillyhepatitis.org).

# HOW DO I AVOID SPREADING HEPATITIS C TO OTHERS?

# BE CAREFUL WITH BLOOD

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Hepatitis C is spread through contact with infected blood. The virus can live in blood outside the body for up to 6 weeks. Take these steps to avoid spreading hepatitis C to others:

- Do not share needles, syringes, cottons, cookers, water, pipes, or snorting devices if you inject, smoke, or snort substances
- 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 a condom during sex

## Use New Works

Prevention Point Philadelphia offers new 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.pponline.org](http://www.pponline.org) to learn more.

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

# TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

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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 2 to 3 shots over a period of 6 months. These shots are safe and effective.
- Schedule regular check-ups with your hepatitis provider. While you wait to start treatment, they will monitor your health and check to see if the disease is damaging your liver.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you take over-the-counter and/or prescriptions drugs to see if they will affect your liver. Some medicines can speed up liver damage if you have hep C.
- 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](http://www.phillyhepatitis.org)

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

## **HEPATITIS C ALLIES OF PHILADELPHIA (HEPCAP)**

[www.hepcap.org](http://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!*

## **HELP-4-HEP**

[www.help4hep.org](http://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/hcv/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm)

# PHILADELPHIA HEALTH CENTERS

## **HEALTH CENTER 1**

Constitution Health Plaza  
1930 S. Broad Street, Floor 2  
Philadelphia, PA 19145  
215-685-6570

(Sexual Health &  
Family Planning Only)

## **HEALTH CENTER 2**

1700 S. Broad Street, Unit 201  
Philadelphia, PA 19145  
215-685-1803

## **HEALTH CENTER 3**

555 S. 43<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
215-685-7504

## **HEALTH CENTER 4**

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

## **HEALTH CENTER 5**

1900 N. 20<sup>th</sup> Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19121  
215-685-2933

## **HEALTH CENTER 6**

321 W. Girard Ave.  
Philadelphia, PA 19123  
215-685-3803

## **HEALTH CENTER 9**

131 E. Cheltenham 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



# PHILLY HEPATITIS

For more information about hepatitis C  
or for help finding testing and support services,  
visit **[www.phillyhepatitis.org](http://www.phillyhepatitis.org)**