

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus ([HCV](#)). It is usually spread by contact with infected blood. It is the most common chronic blood-borne infection in the United States. Eighty percent of persons infected with HCV have no signs or symptoms. You may have HCV for many years and not know it. The virus often leads to chronic liver disease and is the leading reason for liver transplants. One to five percent of infected people may die from HCV. **There is NO vaccine to prevent HCV.**

You may want to be tested if you:

- Were notified that you received blood from a donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C.
- Have ever injected illegal drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago
- Engaged in intranasal cocaine use through the sharing of straws or other instruments
- Received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before July, 1992
- Were a recipient of clotting factor(s) made before 1987
- Have ever been on long-term kidney dialysis
- Have evidence of liver disease:
 - Yellow skin and/or eyes
 - Fatigue
 - Dark urine
 - Abdominal pain
 - Loss of appetite
 - Nausea
- Were born to a mother who had hepatitis C
- Ever had sex with a person infected with HCV
- Ever shared items such as razors or toothbrushes with a person infected with HCV
- Could have been exposed to human blood as a occupational risk
- Had a tattoo or body piercing done by an artist or piercer who doesn't use clean tools, wash hands or wear disposable gloves

1 in 5 people have something in their past that puts them at risk for Hep C.

Why should I be tested for HCV?

If you test positive for HCV, it is very likely that you have chronic (long-term) liver disease. You will need to see a doctor to:

- Determine if you have liver disease and how severe it is.
- Determine if you should be treated for your liver disease.
- Learn how you can protect your liver from further harm.
- Learn how you can prevent spreading HCV to others.

If you think you need an HCV test, discuss this with your doctor - most routine blood tests and yearly physicals DO NOT include screening for the virus. You can call us for more information at 607-547-4230.

If I test positive, how can I prevent spreading HCV to others?

- Do not donate blood, body organs, other tissue or semen.
- Do not share personal items that might have your blood on them, such as toothbrushes, dental appliances, nail-grooming equipment or razors.
- Cover your cuts and skin sores to keep from spreading HCV.
- If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner you should use latex condoms correctly and every time. The efficiency of latex condoms in preventing infection with HCV is unknown, but their proper use may reduce transmission.

HCV IS **NOT** spread by:

- Breastfeeding
- Hugging
- Food or water
- Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses
- Sneezing or coughing
- Casual contact
- Mosquitos or other insects

What blood tests are available to check for hepatitis C?

There are several blood tests that can be done to determine if you have been infected with HCV. You may have one or a combination of these tests. Discuss this with your healthcare provider, or contact the Otsego County Department of Health at 547-4230.

What is the next step if you have a positive HCV test?

Contact your doctor. Additional tests may be needed to check your diagnosis and to see if you have liver damage.

Is there any treatment for chronic hepatitis C?

Combination [therapy](#) with pegylated interferon and ribavirin is the treatment of choice and is effective in 40%-80% of patients.

Why is the health of my liver so important?

Your [liver](#) is one of the largest organs in your body. It is part of the digestive system and performs more than 500 different functions, all of which are essential to life. Its essential functions include helping the body to digest fats, storing reserves of nutrients, filtering poisons and wastes from the blood, making certain proteins, and regulating the levels of many chemicals found in the blood stream. If the liver is damaged repeatedly over a long period of time, it may undergo irreversible changes that permanently interfere with functions.

To find out more about hepatitis C:

1-888-4-HEP-CDC (CDC hepatitis hotline)

You can ask anything, and you do not need to give your name.

You can also find out how to get tested for HIV free, without giving your name:

1-800-541-AIDS

...and about quitting alcohol & drugs:

1-800-522-5353 (Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm)