



# HEPATITIS C and Your Liver

Get Tested. Get Cured!



**NYC**  
Health



EVEN IF YOU FEEL  
HEALTHY, HEPATITIS C  
MAY BE DAMAGING  
YOUR LIVER.

Your liver keeps you healthy in many ways. It removes toxins from your blood and helps transform food into energy.

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. There are different types of hepatitis. **Hepatitis C** (Hep C) is caused by a virus that infects the liver. The virus is transmitted through blood.

# Hep C Can Lead to Serious Health Problems:

- Liver damage
- Cirrhosis
- Liver failure
- Liver cancer

Hep C can even cause death.



## Symptoms

Many people with Hep C **do not** have symptoms and do not know they are infected. Symptoms can take up to 30 years to develop. When symptoms do appear, they are often a sign of advanced liver disease.

Symptoms and signs of Hep C can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Gray-colored stools
- Joint pain
- Jaundice

**If you have Hep C, you're not alone.**

Nearly **4 million** people in the United States have Hep C.  
Almost **150,000** people living in New York City have Hep C.

Learn more about Hep C and make  
the best decisions for your health:  
Visit [nyc.gov/health/hepC](https://nyc.gov/health/hepC)

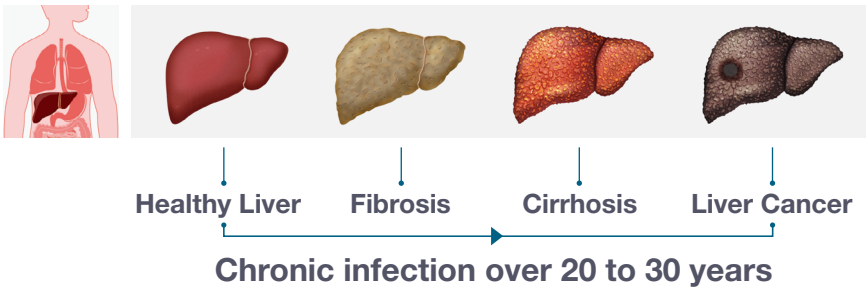
# Stages of Hep C

**Acute Hep C** refers to the first six months of infection.

- Some people who get infected clear Hep C on their own within six months.
- Most people do not have symptoms of Hep C in the acute stage.

**Chronic Hep C** refers to a long-term infection.

- Most people who get infected with Hep C will develop chronic infection.
- Chronic Hep C can cause liver inflammation and scarring that can lead to moderate liver damage (fibrosis) and severe liver damage (cirrhosis).
- People with cirrhosis are at high risk for liver failure, liver cancer and even death.
- Liver damage often happens slowly, over 20 to 30 years.



## Hep C and Liver Health Tests

Your health care provider may perform some of these tests to confirm that you have Hep C or to find out how Hep C is affecting your health:

### Blood Tests

- **Hep C Antibody Test:** Shows if you were ever infected with the Hep C virus. If this test is positive, you'll need to take another test (the Hep C RNA Test) to see if you have Hep C now.

- **Hep C RNA (Viral Load) Test:** Shows how much Hep C virus is in your blood now (viral load). If this test is positive, it means you are currently infected with Hep C.

If you go on Hep C treatment, your Hep C RNA will be checked during and after treatment to find out if the treatment is working. If the treatment is successful, the viral load will drop to zero (undetectable) and stay there. If your viral load is still undetectable 12 weeks after treatment, you will have achieved a sustained virologic response (SVR), which means you are cured. You need the results of this final SVR blood test to confirm you are cured.

- **Hep C Genotype Test:** Shows what type of Hep C virus you have. Knowing your genotype helps your health care provider pick the best treatment for you.
- **Liver Function Tests (LFTs):** Measure how well the liver is working. High levels may mean you have liver inflammation or damage.
- **Liver Fibrosis Tests:** Look for the amount of liver damage (fibrosis).

## **FibroScan**

Noninvasive imaging test that shows liver damage by providing a picture of the shape, size or stiffness of the liver.

## **Liver Biopsy**

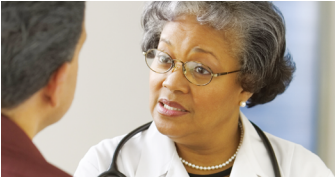
Removal of a small piece of liver tissue with a needle. The tissue is checked under a microscope for damage or disease.

## **Liver Cancer Screening Tests**

Blood tests or ultrasound exams are recommended every six months for people with cirrhosis.

Get tested! It is the only way to know  
if you have Hep C.

# If You Have Hep C,



## Get Care With a Health Care Provider Who Knows About Hep C

See your health care provider regularly to make sure you're staying healthy.

Even if you feel great, your liver may have problems.

Your health care provider will help you make the best decisions to improve your health and protect your liver.

## Treat Hep C to Cure Infection

Most people with Hep C can be **cured** by taking antiviral medication for several months. Being cured means that no virus is found in the blood a few months after finishing treatment.

Thanks to **new Hep C antiviral medication**, treatment is now easy, short and **cures almost all people with Hep C, including people who are HIV positive and those who actively use alcohol or drugs.**

### Current Hep C Treatment

Usually lasts two to three months

Often just one pill a day

Mild side effects

Low-cost or free treatment is available

Treats all genotypes

Almost all patients can be cured.

Hep C medications stop the virus from replicating, which means **it's not just remission, it's a cure!**

**There is no Hep C vaccine or immunity.**

Even if you are treated and cured, you can always get Hep C again. Prevent reinfection by protecting yourself from blood exposure.

## Protect Your Health

**If you have Hep C or cirrhosis, it is safest for your health not to drink alcohol at all.**

Alcohol causes liver damage. Avoiding alcohol is one of the most important things you can do to protect your liver. Learn tips for cutting down at [rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov](https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov).

If you need help cutting down on alcohol, speak with your health care provider or call **311**.

**Ask your health care provider before taking over-the-counter medications, natural medications, vitamins or supplements.**

Some over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), vitamins or supplements such as iron, herbs or “natural drugs” can be dangerous for your liver. Tell all of your health care providers that you have Hep C so they can help you avoid medications that may harm your liver.

**Eat a healthy diet, exercise and maintain a healthy body weight.**

**Get support.** Share your feelings with your health care provider and people you trust.

Consider connecting with a Hep C Support Group in person or online. Visit [HepFree.nyc](https://www.hepfree.nyc) for more information.

If you need help managing your feelings, speak with your health care provider or call **311**.

## Questions to Ask Your Health Care Provider

- I would like to be tested for Hep C because I think I am at risk based on the list on page 9. Can you test me for Hep C?
- What do my test results mean?
- Is my liver damaged? If so, how damaged is my liver?
- Should I get vaccines for other diseases such as Hep A, Hep B or the flu to protect my health?
- What is the best weight, diet and exercise routine for me?
- What is the best care for my Hep C?
- Is it safe for me to take my medicines (including over-the-counter medicines), herbs, vitamins and supplements?
- I would like to be treated to cure Hep C. What are the steps I need to take to be cured?
- How can I pay for my Hep C treatment?





# Protect Others from Hep C

The Hep C virus can live outside of the body.

- **If you inject drugs, only use new or sterile drug use equipment or “works”** such as needles, syringes, cotton, cups, ties, razors, cutters, rinse water, cookers, straws or pipes.
- **Do not share personal care items** such as toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files, nail clippers, nail scissors or washcloths that may have touched your blood.
- **Cover cuts and open sores** with bandages, and make sure others do not touch your blood.
- **Have safe sex.** If you have multiple sexual partners or if you have HIV or a sexually transmitted infection (STI), use condoms every time.
- **Clean up** blood spills with a bleach solution (one part bleach and nine parts water).
- **If you're pregnant, talk about Hep C with your health care provider.** Hep C can be transmitted from mother to baby during pregnancy or childbirth.



## Casual Contact Is Safe

You **cannot** spread Hep C through sneezing, coughing, kissing, hugging, shaking hands or talking, or by sharing eating utensils, drinking glasses, food or drinking water. You should not be excluded from work, school, play or child care if you have Hep C.

# Information and Resources

## **New York City Department of Health**

Call **311** or visit [nyc.gov/health/hepC](https://nyc.gov/health/hepC)

## **Low-Cost Hep C Health Care at NYC Public Hospitals**

[nyc.gov/hhc](https://nyc.gov/hhc)

## **Find Health Insurance**

[access.nyc.gov](https://access.nyc.gov)

## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[cdc.gov/hepatitis](https://cdc.gov/hepatitis)

## **American Liver Foundation**

Hep C helpline, health care provider locator and online support group: 800-465-4837 or [liverfoundation.org](https://liverfoundation.org)

## **Harm Reduction Resources**

[harmreduction.org](https://harmreduction.org)

## **NYC Hep C Task Force**

[HepFree.nyc](https://HepFree.nyc)

# Hep C Risk Assessment

- Were you born between 1945 and 1965?
- Have you ever injected drugs, hormones, steroids, silicone or cosmetics – even if it was once a long time ago?
- Did you have a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992?
- Are you HIV+?
- Were you born in Egypt, Pakistan, Russia or the former Soviet Republic?
- Have you ever inhaled (snorted) drugs?
- Did your mother have Hep C when you were born?
- Have you ever gotten a tattoo or piercing from anyone other than a licensed professional?
- Have you had abnormal liver tests or been told you have liver disease?
- Have you ever been on long-term dialysis?
- Were you ever exposed to blood or stuck with a needle on the job?
- Have you ever been incarcerated?
- Are you a man who has sex with men?
- Do you have sex with multiple partners?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are at risk for Hep C. Talk to your health care provider, visit [nyc.gov/health/hepC](http://nyc.gov/health/hepC) or email [hep@health.nyc.gov](mailto:hep@health.nyc.gov) to find out more about getting tested.

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