

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus. Almost four million people in the U.S have been infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV.)

### Symptoms

Acute Hepatitis C occurs within the first 6 months after being exposed. A few people get rid of the virus without treatment, but most develop chronic (lifelong) infection. Either can have the following symptoms:

- Mild, flu-like illness with fatigue and joint pain
- Fatigue and “brain fog”
- Nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain
- Dark urine (pee), grey-colored poop, and jaundice
- Most often, HCV infection is “silent”—it has no symptoms at all.
- Chronic HCV can lead to liver cirrhosis (scarring), liver failure, or cancer, usually decades after infection.

### Transmission

- Hepatitis C is spread when blood from a person infected with HCV enters the body of someone who is not infected. Most people become infected with HCV by sharing needles or equipment to inject drugs.
- Before screening began in 1992, Hepatitis C was spread by blood transfusions and organ transplants.
- HCV can spread through tattoos if they are not done with proper sanitary precautions.
- Occasionally, HCV can be transmitted through kidney dialysis, or through accidental needle sticks.

### Treatment

- HCV can be sometimes treated with drugs that slow or stop the virus from damaging the liver. Your health care provider will help you decide if and when to start treatment.
- If you have HCV, protect your liver by getting vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B, not drinking alcohol, smoking, or using drugs, and not taking over-the-counter medications unless your doctor says it's OK.

### Prevention

To protect others from getting HCV, follow these common sense rules:

- Do not share personal hygiene items that could have blood on them, such as razors or toothbrushes
- Clean up blood spills with diluted household bleach (1 tablespoon bleach to 1 quart water)
- Cover open cuts with Band-aids.
- Use a condom during sex, especially if you may be exposed to blood during sex
- Ask your doctor before donating blood, body organs, or other body tissue
- Do not share drug needles or cocaine straws with anyone

### Additional Information

To find out if you have HCV, a lab can analyze blood sample. Get tested if you belong to any of these groups:

- IV drug users, or people who injected drugs in the past, even once
- Health care workers who have been exposed to blood from a person with Hepatitis C
- A person whose mother had Hepatitis C when he/she was born
- A person who has been on long-term kidney dialysis
- People who already have HIV infection, abnormal liver tests, or liver disease
- Anyone who received donated blood or organs before 1992

**All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.**



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