

Hepatitis C: Should You Get Tested?



Hepatitis C is an infectious disease that causes inflammation and damage to your liver. It can cause major health problems, including liver disease, liver cancer, and even death. You might not even know you have it because you have no symptoms. Hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). This virus spreads from person to person through blood, generally from engaging in high-risk behaviors like getting tattoos, body piercings, and sharing drug needles. You're at risk for hepatitis C if infected blood enters your body.

Are you at risk for hepatitis? If so, get tested. Over 90% of hepatitis C cases can be cured by taking direct-acting antiviral (DAA) medicine. A timely treatment of DAA medicine is recommended for nearly all individuals with hepatitis C and will prevent liver damage and further spread of the disease. It is important to start the treatment immediately after diagnosis of HCV and not delay this medicine for a spontaneous resolution.

When to get tested

Get tested if you:

- Are 18 years and older
- Are pregnant
- Were born to a mother with hepatitis C
- Have injected illegal drugs, even once
- Have shared needles, syringes, cotton, spoons, water, or other illegal drug equipment
- Have abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- Have received blood or had an organ transplant before 1992
- Have received clotting factors made before 1987
- Have ever had kidney dialysis
- Have tested positive for HIV
- Have ever been in prison
- Were notified that you were transfused blood from a donor who later tested positive for HCV infection

It is important that individuals continue to have periodic testing when risk factors persist. Additionally, individuals who have ongoing medical conditions like maintenance hemodialysis should continue to be tested for HCV on a routine basis.

Other possible risks

Ask your healthcare provider about getting tested if:

- You may have had contact with infected blood at your job.
- You've had sex without a condom with someone who may be infected.
- You've shared personal items, such as a toothbrush or a razor, with someone who may be infected.
- You have tattoos or body piercings.

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