

Overview

Hepatitis C

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Hepatitis C is a virus that can infect the liver. You can become infected with it if you come into contact with the blood of an infected person (blood-to-blood contact).

There is a cure for hepatitis C. Nearly all people with hepatitis C can be cured and treatment is free.

Without treatment, hepatitis C can damage the liver over many years.

Symptoms of hepatitis C

Many people who are infected with hepatitis C do not know it. Hepatitis C often does not have any obvious symptoms until the liver is very damaged.

The only way to know that you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

Some symptoms of hepatitis C can be present in other conditions, such as:

- flu-like symptoms
- feeling tired all the time
- loss of appetite
- [stomach ache](#)
- feeling sick and vomiting

[Symptoms of hepatitis C](#)

Contact your GP if:

- you have any of these symptoms that do not go away

Some people with hepatitis C can also develop jaundice. Jaundice is when your skin or the whites of your eyes turn yellow.

Ask your GP for an urgent appointment if:

- your skin or the white part of your eyes looks yellow

If your GP is not available, contact a GP out of hours or go to your nearest emergency department (ED).

 [Find a GP out of hours](#)

 [Find an ED near you](#)

How hepatitis C is spread

The hepatitis C virus is usually spread through blood-to-blood contact.

Some ways the infection can be spread include:

- sharing unsterilised needles
- sharing razors or toothbrushes
- during pregnancy to an unborn baby
- through unprotected sex - but this is very rare

In Ireland, most hepatitis C infections happen in people who inject drugs or have injected drugs in the past.

[Causes of hepatitis C](#)

Blood and organ donations before October 1991

Hepatitis C was discovered in 1989. Since October 1991, all blood donated in Ireland is checked for the hepatitis C virus. Since 1992, all organ donations are tested for hepatitis C.

There's a small chance you may have been infected with hepatitis C if you had:

- a blood transfusion or blood products before October 1991
- an organ transplant before 1992

Getting tested for hepatitis C

To get a hepatitis C test, you can:

- [order a free hepatitis C test to do at home](#)
- ask your GP
- use a testing service at a sexual health clinic

[Testing for hepatitis C](#)

Treatment for hepatitis C

Hepatitis C can be treated with medicines that stop the virus multiplying inside the body.

Treatment is usually taking direct-acting antiviral (DAA) tablets for 8 to 12 weeks. Using these medicines, more than 95% of people with hepatitis C may be cured.

[Treatment for hepatitis C](#)

Treatment does not make you immune to hepatitis C. But there are things you can do to reduce your risk of becoming infected again.

[Living with hepatitis C](#)

Complications of hepatitis C

If the infection is left untreated for many years, some people with hepatitis C will develop scarring of the liver (cirrhosis).

Over time, this can cause the liver to stop working properly.

In severe cases, life-threatening problems can eventually develop, such as:

- cirrhosis
- liver failure, where the liver loses most or all of its functions
- liver cancer

Treating hepatitis C as early as possible can help reduce the risk of these problems happening.

[Complications of hepatitis C](#)

Preventing hepatitis C

There's no vaccine for hepatitis C, but there are ways to reduce your risk of becoming infected.

To protect yourself from hepatitis C:

- do not share any drug-injecting equipment ('works') with other people - this includes needles, syringes, spoons and filters
- do not share razors or toothbrushes that might be contaminated with blood

The risk of getting hepatitis C through sex is very low. But it may be higher if blood is present, such as period blood or from minor bleeding during anal sex.

It's a good idea to use condoms when having anal sex or sex with a new partner.

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