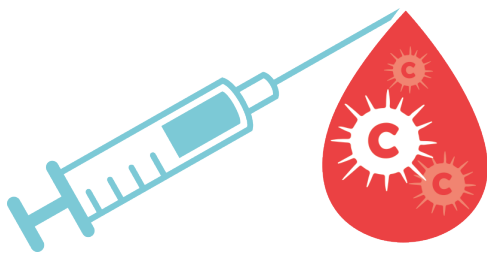


Introduction to hepatitis C

The word hepatitis comes from the Ancient Greek word for liver (hepar) and the Latin word for inflammation (itis). Chemicals, drugs, excessive alcohol consumption or blood-borne viruses can all cause inflammation to the liver.

What is hepatitis C?



Hepatitis C is an infection caused by the hepatitis C virus that causes inflammation of the liver. Infection can occur through blood-to-blood contact due to unsafe injection and other skin penetration practices, inadequate sterilisation of medical equipment, and the transfusion of unscreened blood and blood products.

Currently, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C virus, as there is for hepatitis A and hepatitis B. A person can be re-infected throughout their life and can live with more than one hepatitis virus at once.

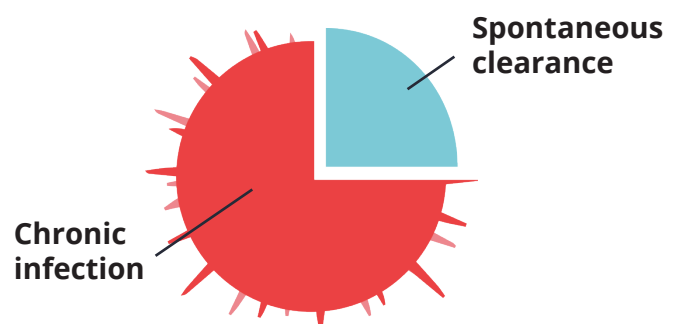
Symptoms and diagnosis

HCV infection can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness.

Common symptoms of acute infection are:

- General aches and pains
- Yellowing of the eyes and skin
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain and discomfort
- Loss of appetite
- Light coloured faeces and dark urine

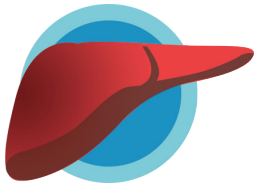
About 25% of people infected will clear the virus naturally in the first 12 months



However, if the infection does not clear up on its own, the virus continues to damage the liver. Of those who are exposed to hepatitis C, up to 75% will go on to develop chronic infection.

A person living with chronic hepatitis C may not know they have it because it can take many years for symptoms to appear. Consequently, many people live undiagnosed for years. Some cannot identify how they were infected.

Impact on the liver



Over time hepatitis C infection can seriously impair liver function, causing fibrosis or cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), and can lead to hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).

The rate of progression to cirrhosis is variable and depends on several factors, including age of initial infection, male gender, alcohol consumption, co-infections including HIV and hepatitis B virus, and obesity. Around 10-15% of people living with chronic HCV infection will develop cirrhosis within the first 20 years after infection; those who develop cirrhosis are at increased risk of HCC.

Geographical distribution

Globally, there are about 70 million people living with hepatitis C, a figure which represents roughly 1% of the population¹. The regions most affected are Africa and Central and East Asia.



1%

70 million people

Hepatitis C genotypes

There are six main genotypes (viral strains) of HCV worldwide, each with numerous subtypes, and their distribution varies by region. Knowing the genotype is important when making decisions about treatment.

New treatments

Unlike HIV and HBV infection, hepatitis C infection can be cured.

Testing for the virus is simple and the new generation treatments are far more effective, easier to take and have fewer side-effects than the older medications.



¹ The Polaris Observatory HCV Collaborators. Global prevalence and genotype distribution of hepatitis C virus infection in 2015: a modelling study. Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatology 2016 Dec 15. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2468-1253\(16\)30181-9](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2468-1253(16)30181-9)