

How can I help myself if I have the virus?

If you have the virus, stop drinking alcohol or reduce the amount of alcohol you drink. This is the most important thing you can do to reduce the damage to your liver.

How can I avoid becoming infected or passing on the virus to others?

- Don't start injecting drugs.
- Stop injecting drugs if you possibly can.
- If you cannot stop injecting drugs, then **never** share drug-injecting equipment. (*Only use your own equipment and do not let anyone else use it.*) This includes needles, syringes, and anything else that might be contaminated with blood.
- Don't help new users start injecting.
- For friendly confidential drugs information and advice 24 hours a day, talk to FRANK. FRANK is the name of the helpline that is part of the national drugs campaign which aims to give advice and help to anyone who is affected by, or wants to know about, drugs. Phone 0800 77 66 00.
- If you are considering getting your ears pierced, or having a body piercing, a tattoo or acupuncture, check that all the equipment such as needles and ink pots are sterile and are not being used more than once.
- If you, or your sexual partner, have hepatitis C, there is a small risk that it could be passed on during sex. Condoms reduce this risk. Using condoms will also help to protect you against unwanted pregnancy, HIV and many other sexually transmitted infections.
- Don't share razors or toothbrushes as they could have had blood on them.

Information and support

If you have any worries or questions, you can talk to your doctor, nurse or call the Hepatitis C Information Line on 0800 451 451 Textphone 0800 0850859. You can also visit the NHS hepatitis C website: www.hepc.nhs.uk

The Hepatitis C Trust

27 Crosby Row, London, SE1 3YD
Helpline: 0870 200 1200
E-mail: info@hepctrust.org
Website: www.hepcuk.info

UK Hepatitis C Resource Centre

PO Box 31844, London, SE11 4DT
Information Line: 0870 242 2467 (10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday)
E-mail: info@hepccentre.org.uk
Website: www.hepccentre.org.uk

The British Liver Trust

2 Southampton Road, Ringwood, Hampshire, BH24 1HY
Helpline: 0800 652 7330
E-mail: info@britishlivertrust.org.uk
Website: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk

Children's Liver Disease Foundation

36 Great Charles Street, Birmingham, B3 3YJ
Phone: 0121 212 3839
E-mail: info@childliverdisease.org
Website: www.childliverdisease.org

Haemophilia Society

First Floor, Petersham House, 57a Hatton Garden, London, EC1N 8JG
Helpline: 0800 018 6068 (10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)
E-mail: info@haemophilia.org.uk
Website: www.haemophilia.org.uk

Talk to FRANK

Helpline: 0800 77 66 00

Sexual Health Line

Helpline: 0800 567 123

Drinkline

Drinkline provides confidential advice and guidance about ways to control or avoid alcohol and related problems.
Helpline: 0800 917 8282

FACE IT
Hepatitis C Awareness



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hepatitis C?



Hepatitis C
Your questions answered

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What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a virus that can damage the liver. Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine to protect against hepatitis C.

How could I get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is carried in the blood. The virus is mainly spread through contact with the blood of a person who has hepatitis C. You can't catch it through everyday contact such as holding hands or hugging and kissing, or through sharing toilets, plates and cups and kitchen utensils.

Hepatitis C can be passed on in the following ways:

- By sharing equipment for injecting drugs, even if you only did this once or twice, or a long time ago. Needles and syringes are the greatest risk, but other drug-injecting equipment (such as spoons, filters, and water) could also carry infection if they are contaminated with blood from someone who has the virus.
- Through a blood transfusion (before September 1991), or blood products like clotting factors (before 1986). All blood in the UK is now screened for hepatitis C.



Hepatitis C can also be passed on in the following ways, although these are less common.

- From a mother with hepatitis C to her baby, before or during the birth.
- Through unprotected sex (without a condom) with someone who has the virus.
- By having a tattoo, an ear piercing, a body piercing or acupuncture with equipment that is not sterile.
- During medical and dental treatment abroad in countries where hepatitis C is common and where equipment may not be sterilised properly.
- By sharing razors or toothbrushes which have been contaminated with blood from someone who has the virus.

See your doctor or nurse if you think you could have been in contact with the virus in any of these ways.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who have the hepatitis C virus have no signs or symptoms at all for many years. But even if you have no symptoms, you can still pass the virus on to others.

How might the virus affect me in the long term?

Around one in four people who become infected with hepatitis C will get rid of the virus naturally. However, most people who become infected will have it for a very long time.

This may affect them in different ways:

- Some people will stay well throughout their life.
- About one in five people may develop severe liver damage (cirrhosis) after many years. In some people, cirrhosis can lead to liver cancer or liver failure.

How do I know if I have the virus?

If you think you could have been in contact with the hepatitis C virus at any time in the past, you can have a test to find out if you have been infected.

Where can I get a test?

Your doctor will be able to test you for hepatitis C. Local drug agencies and sexual health clinics (sometimes called genito-urinary medicine clinics) may also offer testing.

What if the test result is negative?

This probably means that you have never been in contact with the hepatitis C virus. However, it can take up to three months for your body to react to the virus, so the test may not be positive if you have been infected recently. Your doctor may advise you to have a second test.

What if the test result is positive?

The test will tell you whether you have been infected with the virus in the past. It will not tell you if you still have the virus. You will need another test to find this out, and you may need to see a specialist.

Is treatment available?

Treatments for hepatitis C are improving all the time. A form of drug therapy is available that can cure the infection in about half of the people treated. Your doctor and specialist will discuss with you whether treatment is appropriate.