

What You Need to Know About **Hepatitis C**

This handout gives you key information on chronic hepatitis C. It will help you understand why getting screened for hepatitis C infection is important. You will also learn that if you do have chronic hepatitis C, we now have medications that can cure it.

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a type of virus that infects the liver. People who have long-term infection with hepatitis C, called chronic hepatitis C, can develop serious liver disease, including liver cancer and cirrhosis.

KEY POINT!

Effective and safe treatments are available that can cure chronic hepatitis C.

Why should I get screened?

- Most people who have chronic hepatitis C do not know it. This is because chronic hepatitis C usually does not cause any symptoms until a person has had it for years, sometimes decades
- People born between 1945 and 1965 have a greater risk of having chronic hepatitis C
- People with families from the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia are also at greater risk of having chronic hepatitis C
- Having a medical or dental procedure performed outside the United States can also increase your risk of having chronic hepatitis C
- Getting screened is easy. If screening shows that you are at risk for hepatitis C infection, we will help you get tested to find out whether or not you have it

What is involved in testing for hepatitis C infection?

- If screening shows that you are at risk for hepatitis C infection, your health care provider will order a simple blood test. Your provider will need to take a sample of your blood for the test

FAST FACTS

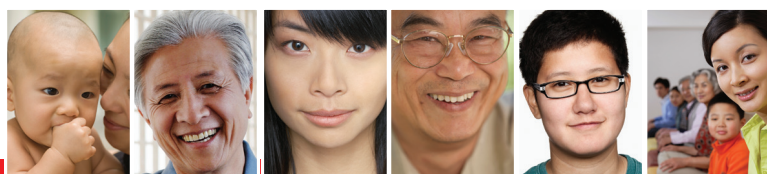
Asian Americans and chronic hepatitis C

- Among patients with chronic hepatitis C and cirrhosis, the risk of liver cancer is 4 times greater in Asians than in Caucasians
- Many Asians are infected with hepatitis C infection at a younger age than other American populations. Having chronic hepatitis C for a longer time increases the risk for getting liver cancer
- The rate of liver cancer among Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States is the highest among all ethnicities
- Chronic hepatitis C is a major cause of liver cancer among Asian Americans
- Asian Americans can have different risk factors for chronic hepatitis C than other ethnicities in the United States. Asian Americans can be at higher risk for having chronic hepatitis C because their families are from certain countries where it is more common or if they had medical or dental procedures performed outside the United States

- The blood-test results will tell your health care provider whether or not you have been infected with hepatitis C. The blood test can also tell if you did have hepatitis C infection at some time in the past but your body fought off the infection

What if I have hepatitis C infection?

- If your blood tests show that you have hepatitis C infection, your health care provider will talk with you about the best way for you to stay healthy and when you should start treatment. Your provider may run additional tests to get a better idea of how your liver is working and how active the hepatitis C virus is in your liver
- Your health care provider may also want you to see another doctor who specializes in treating chronic hepatitis C



What treatment is available if I have hepatitis C infection?

- We have safe and effective treatments for hepatitis C infection now that can cure it with as few as 1 or 2 pills after 2-3 months. The treatments help eliminate the virus from your liver. This will help protect your liver from liver cancer, cirrhosis, or other damage. There are several approved treatments available in the United States, and many more will be available soon
- When it is time to consider treatment, your health care provider will discuss the different options with you, so that you can decide together which approach will work best for you. Your provider will tell you more about treatment and how often you need to come in for appointments
- It is important to keep appointments with your health care provider even though you feel well. Your provider needs to see you periodically to help you stay healthy

If I have hepatitis C infection, how can I protect my family?

- Your family members and people who live with you need to get tested for hepatitis C infection. The best protection against hepatitis C infection is to follow the treatment plan recommended by your health care provider
- Until your hepatitis C infection is cured, you should not share needles with anyone
- But there are no other limits on the things you can do. You can still play contact sports and share food, water, and utensils. You can participate in all types of social activities involving casual contact

Is there a vaccine for hepatitis C infection?

- No, there is no vaccine against hepatitis C infection available in the United States