



Hepatitis C

(Non-A, Non-B Hepatitis)

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (formerly known as non-A, non-B hepatitis) is a viral infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C can lead to lifelong (chronic) infection and can cause serious liver damage (cirrhosis or liver cancer) and death.

Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

Anyone can get hepatitis C, but those at greater risk include:

- Injection drug users.
- Recipients of clotting factors made before 1987.
- Hemodialysis patients.
- Recipients of blood and/or solid organs before 1992.
- Infants born to infected mothers.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

About 80 percent of people have no signs or symptoms. Symptoms may include tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, vomiting, dark urine or jaundice (i.e., yellowing of skin or whites of eyes). Some people recover fully, but 55 percent to 85 percent of infected people carry the virus in their blood for a lifetime and develop chronic infection.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may appear six weeks to six months after exposure, but usually appear within six to seven weeks.

How is hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread primarily through direct exposure to blood or blood products from an infected person. These exposures include:

- Sharing needles or “works” when “shooting” drugs.
- Needlesticks or sharps exposure on the job.
- From an infected mother to her baby during birth.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

The virus can be found in blood weeks before symptoms appear and generally persists for several months afterward. About 55 percent to 85 percent of infected people carry the virus in their bloodstream and may remain contagious for the course of their lifetime.

How is a person diagnosed?

Blood tests are available from your health-care provider.

What is the treatment?

Interferon, pegylated interferon and ribavirin are medications approved for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C. Combination treatment (interferon plus ribavirin or pegylated interferon plus ribavirin) is effective in 50 percent to 80 percent of people.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. Past infection does not provide lifelong immunity. Additionally, a person is still at risk for other hepatitis infections (hepatitis A and B).

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have hepatitis C?

Children should not be excluded unless otherwise recommended by the health department and/or a health-care professional.

What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis C?

People who have hepatitis C should remain aware that their blood and possibly other body fluids are potentially infective. Care should be taken to avoid blood exposure to others by not sharing toothbrushes, razors, needles or any other objects that may have become contaminated with blood. In addition, infected people must not donate blood and should inform their health-care providers so that proper health care can be provided.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics. [Section 3, Summaries of Infectious Diseases]. In: Pickering LK, ed. *Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[page 336]

