Hepatitis C
What is it? Should I get tested?

Everything you need to know about hepatitis C

Mazzoni Center
Hepatitis A, B, and C are different diseases, and the viruses are spread in different ways.

What is hepatitis C?
Hepatitis C is a virus that attacks the liver and can cause swelling and damage. People can have hepatitis C and not show signs or symptoms for years or decades.

What does the liver do?
The liver is one of the largest organs in the human body (see image at left). It removes waste and toxins from your blood.

How is the liver affected by hepatitis C?
Although many times hepatitis C is not a serious threat to health, infection can become long-lasting and can sometimes lead to liver failure, cancer, or death.

Only a blood test can tell you if you have been exposed to hepatitis C.
How common is hepatitis C?

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), about **4 million** Americans currently have hepatitis C and about 19,000 Americans will be diagnosed this year.

Hepatitis C is the most common bloodborne infection in the United States – more common than HIV and hepatitis B. One in four people infected with HIV also have Hepatitis C.

More than 75% of adults with hepatitis C were born between 1945 and 1965 (the “baby boomer” generation).

Why baby boomers?

- Baby boomers who have hepatitis C are believed to have been infected in the 1970s and 1980s when rates of hepatitis C were the highest.
- Since chronic hepatitis C can go unnoticed for up to several decades, baby boomers could be living with an infection that occurred many years ago.
- Testing people from this generation will help identify unknown cases and allow for early diagnosis and treatment.

The CDC now recommends that anyone born between 1945 and 1965 get tested for hepatitis C.

Who should get tested for hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is transmitted from blood to blood contact. You should get tested if you:
- Were born from 1945 through 1965
- Shared needles for drugs or hormones, even just once
- Were treated for a blood clotting problem before 1987
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992
- Are or were on long-term hemodialysis treatment
- Were accidentally stuck with a needle
- Had a tattoo or body piercing done in a non-sterile environment
- Have a current or former partner who had hepatitis C
- Were in prison or jail for more than 24 hours

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

What are the most common signs and symptoms of hepatitis C?

Most people who have hepatitis C will have no symptoms. For those that do have symptoms, some of the most common are:
- Flu-like symptoms including feeling tired, general weakness, and joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhea
- Jaundice
Hepatitis C testing

If you test positive for hepatitis C:

• This means you have been exposed to the hepatitis C virus. Only a follow up test can determine if you are currently infected.
• Your health care provider will work with you to determine what additional tests and treatment options are best for you.
• You should discuss alcohol use with your health care provider, as excessive alcohol may weaken or damage the liver.
• It is recommended that you get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B if you have not done so already.
• You will have to decide whether to tell your partner and previous partners, other family members, friends, or employers about your results. There may be mixed reactions to your test results.

If you test negative for hepatitis C:

• You will know that you do not currently have a detectable infection. Talk to your health care provider about testing again in the future if your risk factor for exposure was recent.
• You can take actions in the future to reduce your chances of getting hepatitis C in the future.

If you decide not to get tested:

• You will not know if you have hepatitis C.
• You may or may not worry about whether you have hepatitis C.
• You could give hepatitis C to someone else without knowing it.
• You will know more about hepatitis C and the risk factors from participating in this study.
Things to remember

• If you were born between 1945 and 1965, consider getting tested for hepatitis C.
• If you have one or more risk factors, consider getting tested for hepatitis C.
• There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.
• People with hepatitis C often have no symptoms and look and feel fine.
• The hepatitis C blood test is quick and easy. It may be for you if you decide that you are at risk.
• Treatment options for hepatitis C are available. Your health care provider can help you decide if treatment is right for you.

» For more information

American Liver Foundation
610-668-0152
www.liverfoundation.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

» Questions for your health care provider


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