

Testing for hepatitis C

- Testing for hepatitis C involves two types of blood tests.
- Tests for hepatitis C are not part of regular blood tests - you have to ask.
- They are free for people with a Medicare card.

There are two blood tests used to test for hepatitis C. You need to give your consent for your doctor to do a hep C test.

These tests are not included in routine blood tests, so you may need to ask your doctor to test for hep C.

Test	What this shows	Meaning if positive
Hep C antibody test	Shows whether you have ever had a hepatitis C infection	You have been exposed to the hepatitis C virus, meaning you have it now or had it in the past.
Hep C RNA test	Shows whether you currently have the hepatitis C virus and how much of the virus you have.	You currently have hep C. Talk to your doctor about getting cured.

Hep C Antibody Test

If you have previously had hep C, including if you have been cured, you will always have hep C antibodies.^{1,2} You do not need to have another antibody test if you have previously tested positive to hepatitis C antibodies.

Having hep C antibodies does not mean you currently have hepatitis C, and the antibodies do not protect you from getting hep C again.

It can take up to 12 weeks from the time hepatitis C enters your blood until your body starts producing hepatitis C antibodies. So, you may need to have another test if you could have caught hep C recently.¹

If you do test positive for hepatitis C antibodies, you will need to have an RNA test. Your doctor may order this at the same time as they antibody test by asking the pathology to clinic to do an RNA test if the antibody test is positive.

Hep C RNA test

The RNA test will confirm whether or not you currently have the hepatitis C virus and how much of the virus you have in your blood (your viral load).³ If you do have the hepatitis C virus, you can pass the virus on to another person through your blood.

Genotype test

Your doctor will most likely also do a genotype test, which will show what genotype (or strain) of the virus you have. Knowing your genotype can help your doctor to determine which DAA medicines to prescribe for you.³

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How much do the tests cost?

The tests are free through Medicare, but there is a limit to how many tests you can get for free each year. You can only get the PCR tests for free if you have tested positive for hepatitis C antibodies. This is why your doctor will do an antibody test first unless you have previously had a positive antibody test result.

You will have to pay the consultation fee unless your doctor bulk bills.

What happens if I have hep C?

It is now very easy to cure hepatitis C with direct-acting antiviral (DAA) medicines. You should talk to your doctor about getting cured and be careful not to let your blood come into contact with anyone else's blood. You should also avoid unprotected anal sex.

DAA medicines are easy to take and most people experience very few side effects. You can read more about the cure for hepatitis C at: hepatitisaustralia.com/hepatitis-c-cures



References:

1. Victoria State Government. (2018, September). Hepatitis C. Retrieved from Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/hepatitis-c/
2. ASHM. Diagnostic Strategies. Retrieved from HCV Testing Portal: testingportal.ashm.org.au/hcv/diagnostic-strategies
3. ASHM. (2019, June). Testing for Hep C. Retrieved from Vimeo: vimeo.com/341923881

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