

What is hepatitis C?

- **Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus that affects your liver.**
- **There is now a highly effective cure for hepatitis C.**
- **Without treatment, hepatitis C can cause liver disease and liver cancer.**

Hepatitis C, sometimes called hep C or HCV, is a virus that causes damage to your liver. It can be chronic, which means you could have it your whole life if you don't get cured.¹

How do you get hepatitis C?

You can get hepatitis C if your blood comes into contact with infected blood. Some of the ways this can happen include:

- sharing needles, syringes or other injecting equipment, including spoons
- tattooing or body piercing with unsterile equipment
- medical procedures with unsterile equipment
- sharing toothbrushes, razors or nail files.¹

There is about a 5% chance that a baby can get hepatitis C during childbirth. This can happen in a vaginal or caesarean delivery. If you are pregnant and have hepatitis C, you should talk to your doctor. If you are thinking about getting pregnant and have hepatitis C, you can talk to your doctor about your options for curing hep C first. You should not take hep C medication if you are pregnant.²

You **cannot** get hepatitis C from:

- hugging or kissing
- sharing food and eating utensils
- eating food made by someone with hep C
- insect or animal bites, including mosquitoes
- sharing bathrooms, showers or toilets
- sneezing or coughing.¹

What happens if you get hep C?

If you get hepatitis C, your body's immune system will try and fight the virus. Then, there are two things that could happen. You could get an **acute** illness or a **chronic** illness.

1. **Acute** hepatitis C means the virus might make you sick for a short time but then you will feel better. About 25% of people only get acute hepatitis C because their body manages to clear the virus. If the virus stays in your liver for more than six months, then you will develop chronic hepatitis C.
2. **Chronic** hepatitis C means the virus stays in your liver for your whole life unless you get cured. You may not always feel sick, but over time the virus can hurt your liver so it does not work properly.³

Simple blood tests can be done to see if the virus is in your blood. You can learn more about testing for hepatitis C here:

hepatitisaustralia.com/testing-for-hepatitis-c

Chronic hepatitis C is a long-term infection

People with chronic hepatitis C can now be cured with direct-acting antiviral (DAA) medicines. But, if left untreated, you can get serious liver damage. Over many years, liver damage can lead to cirrhosis (which means severe scarring of the liver), liver failure or liver cancer.⁴

What is hepatitis C?

The longer term health outcomes from having hepatitis C can be influenced by a number of factors, such as:

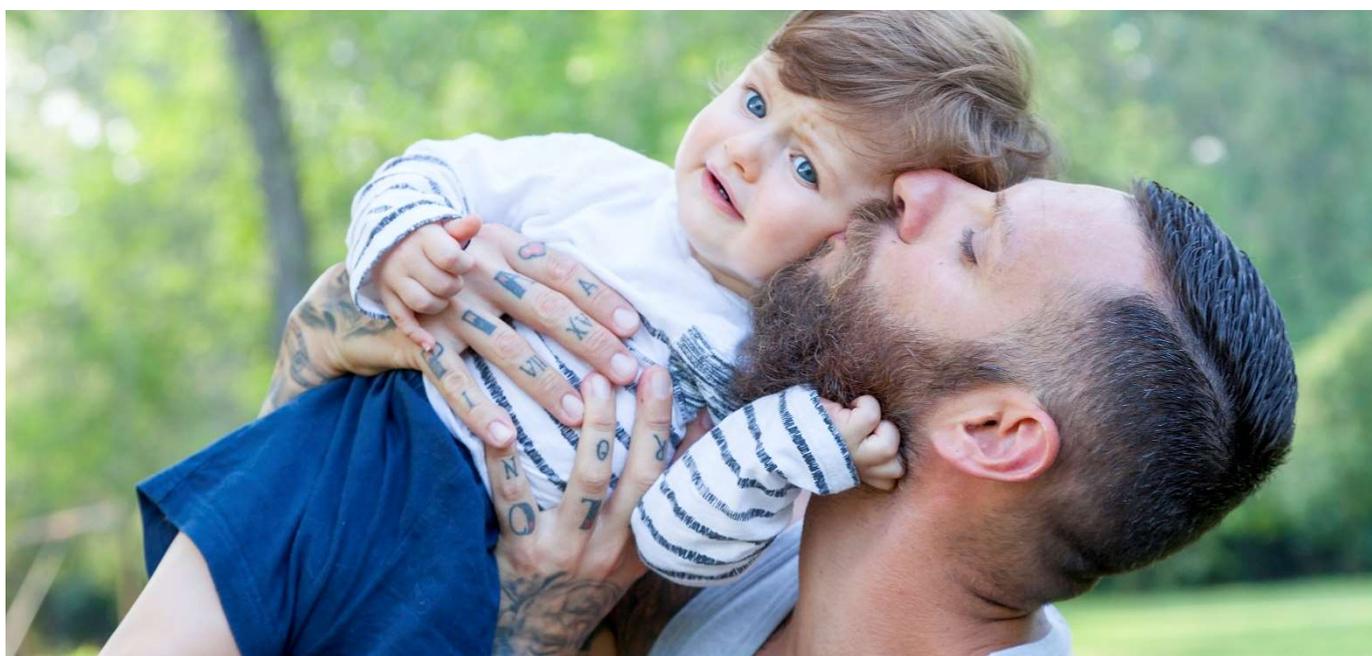
- the age you were when you got hep C
- how much alcohol you drink
- if you have another viral infection.⁵

Having hep C as well as another viral infection (such as HIV or hepatitis B) will put you at greater risk of serious long-term illness. If you

have HIV or hep B as well as hep C, you should see your doctor or specialist regularly.

A cure for hepatitis C

Fortunately, the latest hep C treatments are simple, safe, and very effective. They cure people more than 95% of the time.⁶ You should speak to your doctor about your own situation and being cured of hepatitis C.



References:

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4. The Hepatitis C Trust. (2019). Hepatitis C liver damage progression. Retrieved from The Hepatitis C Trust: <http://www.hepctrust.org.uk/information/impact-hepatitis-c-liver/progression-hepatitis-c>
5. McCaughan, G. W., & George, J. (2004). Fibrosis progression in chronic hepatitis C virus infection. *Gut*, 318-321.
6. WHO. (2019, July 9). Hepatitis C. Retrieved from World Health Organisation: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-c>

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