

Hepatitis: Silent but Treatable

DID YOU KNOW...

African Americans are 1.5 times more likely to die from hepatitis than non-Hispanic whites.

Finding and treating hepatitis **early is easy.**

Treatment of Hepatitis C has been found to be as effective in African Americans as it is in Whites.

If left untreated, hepatitis **can lead to death.**



WHAT IS HEPATITIS?

- Hepatitis is a disease of the liver that can lead to illness and death.
- Your liver is important for staying healthy because it is responsible for storing nutrition, removing waste products, and filtering your blood from alcohol and drugs.
- In the United States, hepatitis is usually caused by infection with one of three viruses commonly referred to as Hep A, Hep B, and Hep C. Hep E is uncommon in the U.S.
- Infection with Hep B or Hep C can lead to cancer.

IMPORTANT FACTS

- A blood test will show if you have hepatitis.
- Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent liver damage and death.
- Excessive alcohol use can lead to fatty liver disease and alcohol hepatitis.
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RISK FACTORS FOR HEPATITIS

HEP A, also known as Hepatitis A virus (HAV), can be passed on if you eat food or drink water that has the virus in it. Usually this is from dirty water or raw fish. People generally get well in less than six weeks with no liver damage.

HEP B, also known as Hepatitis B virus (HBV), can also be spread from direct through direct contact with infected blood and body fluids, including saliva. Hep B can also be spread by unprotected sexual contact and it can be passed to a baby at birth from the mother.

HEP C, also known as Hepatitis C virus (HCV), is spread through blood and body fluids. The most common way to get infected with HCV is through injection drug use. You can get Hep C by having unprotected sex, sharing drug needles, and getting body piercings or tattoos that use dirty ink or needles. You can even get Hep C and Hep B by sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers with someone who has this condition.



HOW CAN I GET HEPATITIS?

- Hepatitis is usually caused by a virus, but not the same virus that causes other ailments, flu or colds.
- Hepatitis can also come from heavy, long term alcohol drinking, poisons, some medicines, or from some other medication conditions.
- Hepatitis viruses are not HIV or AIDS, but are spread in the same way.
- Hep B and Hep C can be spread by sharing needles, getting body piercings, and tattoos that use dirty ink or needles.
- You can get Hep B and Hep C by using personal items of those infected, such as toothbrushes, razors or nail clippers.
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HOW DOES HEPATITIS AFFECT AFRICAN AMERICANS?

- In 2013, African Americans were 1.5 times more likely to die from hepatitis than non-Hispanic whites.
- African Americans have the highest rate of hepatitis B than any other ethnic group. In 2013, African Americans were three times more likely to die from Hep B than non-Hispanic whites.
- African Americans who are baby boomers are twice as likely to have Hep C than other Americans.
- African Americans who received blood transfusions a long time ago to treat illnesses, such as sickle cell anemia, may have hepatitis and don't know it.

WHY SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS?

- Most people do not feel sick until the virus causes severe liver damage, which can take 10 or more years.
- A blood test will show if you have hepatitis, and early diagnosis and treatment can prevent liver damage.
- Thousands of Americans get hepatitis each year.
- More people die from hepatitis than from HIV or AIDS.
- In the U.S. baby boomers –are more likely to get Hep C. The CDC recommends that all baby boomers be tested for Hep C.

WHAT DOES NOT CAUSE HEPATITIS?

- You cannot get Hep C or Hep B by touching sweat, urine, or tears.
- You cannot get Hep C or Hep B from sneezes or coughs.
- You cannot get Hep B or Hep C through blood transfusions because of safety improvements in blood donations since 1992.

PREVENTION, VACCINATIONS AND TREATMENT

- Avoid risky behaviors such as excessive alcohol use, intravenous drug use, getting tattoos from unlicensed places and sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, needles, razors or nail clippers with someone who has hepatitis.
- Hep A can be prevented through vaccinations.
- Hep B can be prevented through vaccinations. Babies are often vaccinated against Hep B before they even leave the hospital.
- There is no vaccination for Hep C but it can be treated.
- If you test positive for hepatitis and have not been treated in the past, you should ask for treatment now—today's treatment options are easier than in the past.

WHERE CAN I GET TESTED?

- You can get tested at your doctor's office. Most public health offices will test for hepatitis.
- See your doctor right away if you think you have been in contact with someone who has hepatitis.
- The next time you see a doctor, ask to get tested for hepatitis.
- In many instances, you can get tested for free.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

To find out more, visit a health professional. Information is available online:

NHITunderserved.org/Hepatitis.html



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This fact sheet was created with funds from the Office of Minority Health Resource Center.