

Hepatitis: Silent but Treatable

DID YOU KNOW...

American Indians/Alaska Natives are more likely to get hepatitis than some other groups.

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

Treating hepatitis is key to protecting you.

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 stores nutrition, removes waste products, and filters alcohol and drugs from you blood.
- In the United States, hepatitis is usually caused by infection with one of three viruses commonly referred to as Hep A, Hep B, Hep C. Hep E is uncommon in the U.S.
- Infection with Hep B or Hep C can lead to cancer.
- Hepatitis is usually caused by a virus, but not the same virus that causes other ailments like flu or colds.
- Hepatitis viruses are not HIV or AIDS, but are spread in the same ways.

IMPORTANT FACTS

- Excessive alcohol use can lead to fatty liver disease and alcohol related hepatitis.
- Risk factors are different for the different types of Hepatitis, as are ways to prevent and treat hepatitis.

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 the Hepatitis B virus (HBV), is spread through 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 virus is also spread from direct contact with infected blood and body fluids, like Hep B. 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.



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.

WHY SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS?

- A blood test will show if you have hepatitis, and early diagnosis and treatment can prevent liver damage.
- Most people who have hepatitis don't know they have it because they don't feel sick until the virus causes severe liver damage, which can take 10 or more years. So, they can spread it to others by accident.
- Thousands of Americans get hepatitis each year.
- More people die from hepatitis in the U.S. annually than from HIV or AIDS.

HOW DOES HEPATITIS AFFECT AMERICAN INDIANS/ALASKA NATIVES?

- In 2014, American Indian/Alaska Native persons had the highest rates of Hep A.
- In 2012, American Indians/Alaska Natives were two times as likely to get Hep C as people in the White population.
- In 2013, American Indians/Alaska Natives were almost three times as likely to die from Hep C than Whites.
- American Indian/Alaska Native women are over two times more likely to die from viral hepatitis than White women.

WHERE CAN I GET TESTED?

- You can get tested at your Tribal health clinic, urban Indian agency/clinic, or your private doctor's office. Most public health offices will test for hepatitis.
- See the doctor right away if you think you have been in contact with someone who has hepatitis.

- The next time you see your doctor, ask to get tested for hepatitis.
- In many instances, you can get tested for free.
- 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.

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 LEARN MORE?

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

NHUnderserved.org/Hepatitis.html

www.swn8vhepc.org

www.astho.org/Programs/Infectious-Disease/Minnesota%E2%80%99s-White-Earth-Tribal-Hepatitis-C-Intervention/

www.nastad.org/domestic/viral-hepatitis

www.caringambassadors.org



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