

What is Hep C?

Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus. It is transmitted when infected blood enters another person's blood stream. If left untreated it can cause liver disease, liver cancer and death.

To find out more about the risk factors for hepatitis C access the NHS Choices website here: Hepatitis C - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Risk factors:

There are a number of risk factors for hepatitis C...

- Sharing drug injecting equipment or other drug using equipment (including syringes, needles, spoons, water or filters for drawing up, crack pipes, or snorting straws/notes).
- Blood transfusion before September 1991, or a blood product before 1986.
- Dental or medical treatment abroad in unsterile conditions.
- Piercing, tattoo, electrolysis, semi-permanent make up or acupuncture using equipment which may have not been sterilised.
- Vertical transmission (from mother to baby during childbirth).
- Unprotected sex with someone who may have had hepatitis C (especially if there were opportunities for blood to blood contact during sex).
- Needle stick injury.

Symptoms:

Not everyone experiences symptoms of an early hepatitis C infection. Symptoms can be misinterpreted as another illness.

Jaundice (yellowing of eyes and skin)

Feeling sick/vomiting

Tiredness

Loss of appetite

Abdominal pain

High temperature (above 38C)

Testing:

There are different ways to get tested. Testing is easy and the time to get results can vary depending on the method of testing used. If a person has been exposed to hepatitis C it can take up to 3 months before there is a hepatitis C antibody positive result. In some cases it can take up to 6 months.

Test 3 months after a potential exposure to the virus, then 3 months after that. If a person remains at risk from hepatitis C it's good practice to test them every 12 months. If a person has a positive hepatitis C result, in some cases, further tests and investigations may be required.



Did you know:

There are 6 main types of hepatitis C known as genotypes. Some genotypes are more common in different areas of the world. All genotypes can be treated.



Types of testing:



1. **Venous blood sample** = getting a sample from a vein - can take lots of tests at the same time

2. **Capillary Blood Test (CBT)** = finger prick of blood into a small tube - great for when it's hard to access a vein

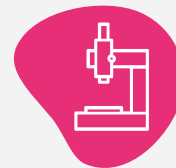


3. **GenExpert Cepheid machine** = finger prick of blood into a machine - tests for active hepatitis C RNA in 60 minutes

4. **Dry blood spot testing (DBST)** = finger prick of blood dropped onto a card - great for when it's hard to access a vein

Treatment:

Hepatitis C can be cured with Direct Acting Antiviral treatments (DAAs).



They are effective 90-95% of the time (usually one tablet a day for 8-12 weeks). Treatment is available to everyone.

12 weeks after a person finishes their treatment a viral load/Hep C RNA test will be taken to check if the virus has been eliminated from their system.

What the testing results mean:

Roughly 25% of people who acquire a hepatitis C infection spontaneously clear the virus in the first 6 months, however, 75% go on to develop chronic hepatitis C. Spontaneous clearance is where the body's immune system automatically fights the virus.

Hep C Antibody positive + Hep C RNA negative = **Previously came into contact with hepatitis C, does not have current infection**

Hep C Antibody negative + Hep C RNA negative = **Has not come into contact with the hepatitis C virus**

Hep C Antibody positive + Hep C RNA positive = **Has the active hepatitis C virus**

There may be some cases when a person may have had hepatitis C virus where the hepatitis C antibody is not picked up on some forms of testing. If a person has had successful treatment, or has cleared the virus spontaneously, they are not protected from being infected if they come into contact with the virus again - it's important to reduce the risk of coming into contact with the virus again.

Hepatitis C Elimination:

There is currently a global goal of eliminating hepatitis by 2030. Nationally, England aims to eliminate hepatitis C by 2025. To read more about progress towards this goal read the latest UKHSA report: [Hepatitis C in the UK 2023: working to eliminate hepatitis C as a public health threat \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/hcv-uk-2023-report.pdf).

To find out more about hepatitis C and explore resources you can visit our website: [Home - HEP C u later](https://www.hepcu.org.uk).

If you are a healthcare professional and would like more information on how to get involved with the effort to eliminate hepatitis C contact us on: connect.HepCULater@mpft.nhs.uk