Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

What is HCV?
Hepatitis C Virus is a contagious liver disease. Approximately 75%-85% of people who become infected with HCV will develop “chronic”, or lifelong infection.

What are the symptoms?
In those persons who do develop symptoms, the average time period from exposure to symptom onset is 4–12 weeks (range: 2–24 weeks):
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored stool
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin/eyes)

Persons with newly acquired HCV infection usually have mild symptoms or no symptoms at first.

How long is a person contagious?
A person is contagious from one or two weeks before symptoms appear and during the entire time the person is ill. All persons who have been diagnosed with HCV should be considered infectious.

How is it spread?
It is spread through exposure to infectious blood and bodily fluids:
- Needle stick injuries.
- Injection drug use.
- Receipt of donated blood, blood products, and organs (although rare, since blood screening became available in 1992).

Very rarely it is spread through sexual contact.

What should I do if I have symptoms?
Contact your healthcare provider.

How is HCV diagnosed?
By a specific blood test.
- Get tested if you:
  - Inject illegal drugs
  - Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
  - Have HIV
  - Received long-term hemodialysis
  - Have symptoms of liver disease
  - Have known exposure or born to an HCV positive mother

How is HCV treated?
Antiviral drugs are available for those with chronic infection.

Is there a vaccine available?
No vaccine is available.

How can I prevent the spread of HCV?
- If you are diagnosed with HCV:
  - Be aware that your blood and body fluids are infectious to others.
  - Do not donate blood and inform your dental and medical provider so proper precautions can be followed.
  - Inform your sexual partners and properly use latex condoms.
- Avoid blood exposure to others.
- Do not share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, or needles.

For further information visit:
- [http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv)

Report Hepatitis C cases to Saint Louis County Department of Public Health by calling 314 615 1630

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