

What is Viral Hepatitis?

Viral HEPATITIS is “inflammation of the liver” caused by a viral infection.

A number of viruses can lead to inflammation of the liver including the hepatitis viruses. The most common types of viral hepatitis infections in the United States are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. There are fewer cases of hepatitis D and hepatitis E virus infections in the U.S.

Viral hepatitis infections can be acute (short term) or chronic (long-term or lifetime).

The hepatitis viruses all affect the liver, but are different from each other in their:

- ◆ Types of genetic material,
- ◆ Modes of transmission from person to person,
- ◆ Incubation periods (length of time from exposure until symptoms appear),
- ◆ Availability of vaccines to prevent infection,
- ◆ Likelihood that the infection will become chronic,
- ◆ Likelihood of developing liver damage, cirrhosis, or liver cancer, and
- ◆ Types of treatment available.

Most people with viral hepatitis have NO symptoms.



Healthcare providers only test for hepatitis viruses when they are aware of certain risk factors or they suspect liver inflammation or damage. Since most people have no symptoms of viral hepatitis, it is important to talk with your doctor about your risk factors and if concerned, ask for viral hepatitis tests.

If you suspect you have hepatitis, even if you have no symptoms, see a doctor right away. Acute hepatitis can be life threatening. For new infections, medications may help fight off the virus so that the infection does not become a chronic (long-term or life-long) infection. If the hepatitis is chronic, you and your doctor can help to keep your liver healthy.



Hepatitis A, B, and C are Different Diseases

There are five known hepatitis viruses, each named with letters of the alphabet. Hepatitis A, B and C are most common in the United States. Hepatitis D and E are relatively rare. Each of the viruses affect the liver, but they are different types of viruses. Each of the viruses and the illnesses they cause are discussed in more detail in other sections of this guide. Below is a brief overview of hepatitis A, B and C.

Hepatitis A: The hepatitis A virus is spread by the ingestion of fecal matter (stool, poop, shit). This usually occurs by eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water. It can also happen during oral sex, particularly oral-anal sex. People with hepatitis A who do not wash their hands after using the restroom can contaminate food or other items that are then put in the mouth. Hepatitis A is found throughout the world and is especially common in developing countries with poor sanitation systems. Hepatitis A is rarely life-threatening, though it can cause severe problems and even death in people with chronic liver disease, HIV, and other health conditions. Most people fight off the disease in a few weeks or a few months and it does not cause chronic hepatitis (infection lasting longer than six months). Infected persons may or may not have symptoms and symptoms can range from mild to severe. Children rarely show symptoms. Hepatitis A can be prevented by a vaccine (two shots spaced six months apart). Most U.S. cases are

person-to-person transmission, but you can get it from contaminated water or ice, raw shellfish, or uncooked fruits and vegetables. It is important to wash hands after using the restroom, changing diapers, changing bedpans or handling soiled clothing and bedding.

Hepatitis B: The hepatitis B virus is spread by contact with infected blood or bodily fluids. It can be transmitted during sex and from mother to child during birth. The hepatitis B virus is 100 times more contagious than HIV and it can cause liver failure, liver cancer, cirrhosis and death. Most people with hepatitis B have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they can include loss of appetite, fatigue, stomach cramps, vomiting and in some cases, the eyes and skin may turn yellow. Acute hepatitis B is a new infection (less than 6 months). Some people are able to fight off the virus and get better. For others, the infection becomes chronic (more than 6 months). People with chronic hepatitis B infection usually remain infected for the rest of their lives. Hepatitis B is spread by sexual contact, sharing injection equipment, razors, needles or toothbrushes, from mother to infant during birth and by unsterile tattooing or body piercing equipment. According to the CDC more than 300,000 Americans are infected with the hepatitis B virus each year and one million are chronically infected. Hepatitis B can be prevented through vaccination and eliminating exposure to the virus. People who are sexually active, health care workers, emergency responders, or travel to certain areas of Asia, Africa, and Central and South America should get the hepatitis B vaccine (a three shot series taken over a six month period).

Hepatitis C: The hepatitis C virus is transmitted by contact with infected blood or bodily fluids. Hepatitis C infection can cause chronic liver disease, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. IV drug users, health care professionals exposed to needle sticks, and people who received blood transfusions, blood products, or organ transplants before 1992 are at high-risk for hepatitis C infections. Others who may be at-risk are prisoners, and people who received unsterile tattoos and piercing and hemodialysis. Most people who get infected, become chronically infected. Unfortunately there is no vaccine available for hepatitis C.





Are You At Risk For Hepatitis A?

Check any box that applies to you

Work History

- Sanitation worker (sewer worker, sewage treatment worker, plumber)
- Health or institutional care (nurse, nursing aid, home health aid, orderly, cleaning staff, laboratory staff)
- Childcare worker
- Work that takes you to countries where hepatitis A is common
- Law enforcement (corrections officers, cleaning staff)
- Other work with exposure to human waste

Medical History (have you experienced any of the following?)

- Hemophilia or clotting disorder
- Diagnosed with HIV
- Diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease
- Have a household member with hepatitis A or with any of the above experiences

Activities

- Household member or sex partner has hepatitis A
- Travel to a country where hepatitis A is common
- Anal sex
- Oral-anal sex (rimming)
- Live in an institutional setting (such as long-term care, group home)
- Work in or have children in childcare settings
- Inject drugs (including steroids and hormones) with unsterile equipment



**A check in any box indicates possible exposure to the hepatitis A virus.
Ask your healthcare provider about the hepatitis A vaccine.**

Are You At Risk For Hepatitis B?

Check any box that applies to you

Work History

- Health care (nurse, doctor, dentist, dental hygienist, orderly, cleaning or laboratory staff)
- Emergency responder (police officer, firefighter, paramedic)
- Tattoo artist or body piercer
- Institutional worker with possible blood contact (such as jail, nursing homes, psychiatric hospital, substance abuse clinic)
- Other work with exposure to blood or bodily fluids

Medical History (have you experienced any of the following?)

- Blood transfusion or received blood products or a transplant before 1992
- Medical treatment outside the U.S. including transfusion, surgery, or injections
- Hemodialysis
- Hemophilia
- Diagnosed with hepatitis C
- Diagnosed with HIV
- Diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease
- Have a household member with hepatitis B or with any of the above experiences

Activities (Past or present- even if only once!)

- Tattoo in unsterile conditions (street, prison, other setting without sterilizing equipment)
- Piercing in unsterile setting
- Shared a razor, toothbrush, or household item that could have blood on it
- Sex without a condom with an infected (or possibly infected) person
- Multiple sexual partners
- Inhaled cocaine with shared straws
- Injected drugs (including steroids and other hormones) with unsterile "works"
- Household member or sex partner with hepatitis B or any of the above activities

A check in any box indicates a possible exposure to the hepatitis B virus. Ask a healthcare worker for a hepatitis B test and about hepatitis B vaccination. HepTREC also recommend testing for HIV and hepatitis C.



Are You At Risk For Hepatitis C?

Check any box that applies to you

Work History


- Health care (nurse, doctor, dentist, dental hygienist, laboratory staff)
- Emergency responder (police officer, firefighter, paramedic)
- Tattoo artist, body piercer
- Institution workers with possible blood contact (such as jail or prison, nursing homes, substance abuse clinic, psychiatric hospital)
- Other work with exposure to blood or bodily fluids

Medical History (have you experienced any of the following?)

- Blood transfusion, blood products, or transplant before 1992
- Medical treatment outside the U.S. including transfusion, surgery, or injections
- Hemodialysis
- Hemophilia
- Diagnosed with hepatitis B
- Diagnosed with HIV

Activities (have you engaged in any of the follow -past or present- even if only once!)

- Tattoo in unsterile conditions
- Piercing in unsterile setting
- Shared a razor or item with blood on it
- Sex without a condom with an infected (or possibly infected) person
- Multiple sexual partners
- Inhaled cocaine with shared straws
- Injected drugs or medications with unsterile "works"
- Household member or sex partner with hepatitis C or any of the above activities



**A check in any box indicates a possible exposure to the hepatitis C virus.
Ask your healthcare provider for a hepatitis C test.
HepTREC also recommends testing for HIV and hepatitis B.**