

## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a disease resulting from infection with the hepatitis C virus.

**Acute hepatitis C** occurs in the first 6 months after a person is infected with the hepatitis C virus. Most people never experience any symptoms or very only very mild flu-like symptoms. 15% of people who are infected with the hepatitis C virus will spontaneously clear the infection.

**Chronic hepatitis C** occurs when the hepatitis C virus remains in the body. Over time, it can lead to serious liver damage; cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer.

## How common is hepatitis C?

50,000  
potentially infected

Worldwide, 200 million people are infected with the hepatitis C virus – approximately 3% of the world's population.

42,500  
develop chronic infection

An estimated 45-50,000 New Zealanders have the hepatitis C virus but only 25% of those have been diagnosed.

10,000  
develop cirrhosis

100 - 200  
develop liver failure  
or liver cancer per year

Hepatitis C is twenty times more common than HIV.

## How do I get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is spread when blood from a person infected with hepatitis C enters the body of someone who is not infected.

## Can hepatitis C be cured?

The treatment for hepatitis C will cure about 65% of people overall.

New treatments currently being developed and trialled may increase this cure rate even further.

**Only 25% of New Zealanders with hepatitis C have been diagnosed**

# Hepatitis C Patient Information

## Who is at risk of having hepatitis C?

- People who share needles or other equipment to inject drugs
- People who received a blood transfusion before 1992
- People who have lived in, or received health care in South East Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, or Eastern Europe
- People who have been in prison and used unsterile needles or been involved in unsafe tattooing practices
- Anyone with abnormal, unexplained liver function.

## How do I know if I have hepatitis C?

Most people who have hepatitis C have no signs or symptoms for many years. The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to have a blood test.

If you think may have been exposed to the virus, speak to your GP about being tested.

## How can I avoid getting hepatitis C?

Although there is currently no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C, you can take reasonable precautions to avoid becoming infected with the hepatitis C virus.

- Do not share needles or other equipment to inject drugs or any other substances
- Do not use personal items that may have come in contact with an infected person's blood such as shavers or toothbrushes
- Avoid touching blood or open wounds
- Avoid sexual practices that might risk blood contact including trauma, during menstruation, or in presence of genital ulcers).

**If you think you have been exposed to the virus,  
speak to your GP about being tested.**