

What about my partner?

If you have hepatitis C, you can pass the infection onto someone else. If your partner has been at risk, they should be tested for hepatitis C.

To prevent passing hepatitis C to your partner (or partners), you need to make sure that your blood is not in contact with them by:

- never sharing drug injecting equipment such as needles or syringes
- never letting anybody else use your razors, toothbrushes or any personal items that might have your blood on them
- using condoms during sex.

For more advice, talk to your doctor or nurse.

When can I have sex again?

This will depend on the stage of your hepatitis C infection. This will be explained to you by the doctor or nurse who sees you.

What happens if my hepatitis C is left untreated?

About one in four people with hepatitis C get fully better without any treatment.

However, most people will carry the virus for many years, or even for the rest of their lives.

Without treatment, hepatitis C can lead to severe liver problems like cirrhosis (scarring) or liver cancer, years after infection.

You can order more copies of this leaflet free of charge from www.healthpromotion.ie

**Sexual Health &
Crisis Pregnancy Programme**



A guide to
Hepatitis C
for men who have
sex with men (MSM)

October 2017

sexualwellbeing.ie



What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that infects the liver.

Worldwide, it is an important cause of long-term liver disease, such as liver cirrhosis (scarring) and liver cancer.

At the moment, there is no vaccination against hepatitis C.

How common is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a major cause of liver disease worldwide.

In Ireland, most cases of hepatitis C are found to be in people who inject drugs.

Recently, the number of cases of sexually transmitted hepatitis C diagnosed in men who have sex with men (MSM) in Ireland, has increased. Many cases have been in MSM who are also infected with HIV and in MSM who are having high risk sex and taking drugs.

How do I get hepatitis C?

The main way hepatitis C can be passed on is through injecting (slamming) drugs, by sharing needles and injecting equipment (works).

Hepatitis C can also be passed on through sexual activity. It is much harder to catch through sex than hepatitis A or B but is becoming more common among MSM.

You can get hepatitis C when infected blood finds its way into your bloodstream (blood-to-blood contact). This might happen through activities like fisting, double penetration or prolonged sexual activity with multiple partners.

You cannot catch hepatitis C from:

- sneezing or coughing
- kissing or hugging
- breastfeeding
- food or water
- sharing dishes or glasses
- casual contact (such as work).

What symptoms would I have with hepatitis C?

Most people have no symptoms when they first get hepatitis C.

Those who have symptoms may experience fever, tiredness, decreased appetite, feeling sick or vomiting, stomach pain, dark urine, pale faeces (poo), joint pain and jaundice (yellowing of skin).

About 1 in 4 people with hepatitis C clear the infection themselves without any treatment. However, most people will carry the virus for many years, or even for the rest of their lives. This is known as 'chronic' hepatitis C infection.

If you have a chronic infection, you may feel well for many years. Without treatment, hepatitis C can lead to severe liver problems like cirrhosis (scarring) or liver cancer, years after infection.

It is important to get tested for hepatitis C if you have been at risk.

How can I be tested for hepatitis C?

Testing for hepatitis C involves a blood test.

First, your blood is tested for hepatitis C antibodies. If this is positive, then you have had hepatitis C at some time.

A second test is then needed to see if you are still infected.

- If this is negative, then you have had hepatitis C infection in the past, but you may have cleared it and no longer be infected
- If the test is positive, you still have hepatitis C.

Your doctor or nurse will explain what the results mean for you.

How can I prevent myself from getting hepatitis C?

There is currently no vaccination available to prevent hepatitis C.

Prevention of hepatitis C relies on having safer sex and not sharing needles.

Having had hepatitis C before will not stop you from getting it again.

Can hepatitis C be treated?

Yes, hepatitis C can be treated with anti-viral medications. If you are diagnosed with hepatitis C, you will need to see a doctor who specialises in the treatment and management of the infection. Your doctor or nurse will explain the treatment options that are available to you.