

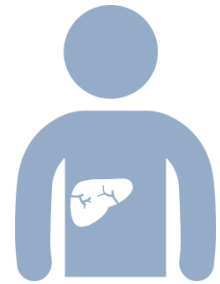
# Hep C 101

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## What is Hepatitis C?

Hepat (liver) + itis (inflammation) = hepatitis

Hepatitis C (or Hep C) is a virus that is carried in the blood and that affects your liver. Your liver is the second largest organ in your body and is located under your ribs on the right side of your abdomen. It is a very important organ in your body as it helps break down toxins and fight infections among many other things. You simply cannot live without it. When untreated, hepatitis C can cause serious liver damage. Unlike the hepatitis A and B viruses, **no** vaccination exists for the hepatitis C virus.



## How is Hep C transmitted?

Hep C is transmitted blood to blood. The virus can live outside the body for a number of days.



Risk activities include:

- Blood transfusion prior to 1991
- Sharing needles
- Sharing snorting equipment such as pipes, straws or bills
- Sharing tattooing or piercing equipment
- Rough unprotected sex (anal or vaginal)
- Sharing razors or toothbrushes
- Vertical transmission (mother to child)

You **cannot** get Hep C by hugging, kissing, sharing cups and/or eating utensils with an infected person.

## What are the signs and symptoms of Hep C?

Hepatitis C is a slow progressing disease meaning that someone can be infected for a long time before experiencing any signs and symptoms. Some symptoms include fatigue, fever, vomiting or nausea and/or stomach pains. If you are unsure about symptoms you may be experiencing, talk to your healthcare provider.

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

Getting tested is the only way to find out. This is done through a simple 2-step blood test.



### Step 1: Antibody test

- Antibodies are footprints in your blood. This test will tell you whether your body has come into contact with the virus. Even if this test comes back positive, it doesn't mean you have Hep C, it just means that you've been exposed to it at some point in your life. About 1 in 4 people will clear Hep C on their own!



### Step 2: RNA test

- If the antibody test comes back positive, your blood will then be checked for presence of the Hep C virus. This confirms whether or not you are currently infected with hepatitis C. At this time, we will also be able to find out what genotype you have.
- **Genotypes** are different strains of the virus. In Canada, the most common genotype is genotype 1 followed by genotypes 2 and 3. Other genotypes include 4, 5 and 6 and are more common in other parts of the world. Knowing your genotype will help determine which treatment you may need.

Many healthcare providers do not routinely test patients for Hep C, so make sure to ask for a test on your next visit! Testing can be done through your family doctor, public health unit, community health centre and sexual health clinics.

## I have Hep C. Now what?

The good news is that you can live a long and healthy life without the hepatitis C virus affecting you. If you know you have hepatitis C, you want to take good care of your liver and body by doing the following:

- limiting your alcohol and drug intake
- sleeping well
- decreasing stress
- exercising and staying active
- visiting your healthcare provider on an annual basis



You and your healthcare provider will be able to decide whether or not you need treatment. There are a number of very effective treatment options available so it is important to talk to your liver specialist about your options. Most people who go through a treatment regimen will end up being cured from hepatitis C.

For more info, including current available treatments, visit [www.catie.com](http://www.catie.com).