

# Hepatitis C: Why All Adults Should Get Tested

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## **Why should all adults get tested for Hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C can cause liver damage, cirrhosis and liver cancer. **Cirrhosis** is when liver cells are killed and scar tissue forms. The scarring process is called fibrosis, and it happens slowly over many years. When the liver is scarred, it shrinks and hardens.

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C but there are highly effective treatments that can cure it. It is important to diagnose and treat hepatitis C early, before cirrhosis. Treatment can reverse liver damage and prevent liver failure and liver cancer. Once cirrhosis has developed, liver cancer can continue to occur even if treatment eliminates the virus. Simple, safe, and highly effective oral antiviral drugs can cure hepatitis C in more than 95 out of 100 (95%) of patients who have not developed cirrhosis. This is considered one of the miracles of modern medicine.

After many years of decreasing new cases of hepatitis C in the United States, there has been an increase in the last 7-8 years, mostly among young adults. This recent increase, plus the availability of a cure, led to the US Prevention Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommendation that all adults 18-79 years old should be screened for hepatitis C at least once. Screening can lead to early diagnosis, treatment and a cure before liver damage progress to cirrhosis.

## **What should I know about Hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is a serious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus. Some people who get infected with Hepatitis C are able to clear, or get rid of, the virus, but most people who get infected develop a chronic, or lifelong, infection. Over time, chronic Hepatitis C can cause serious

health problems including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer and even death. In fact, Hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver cancer and the leading cause of liver transplants. People with Hepatitis C:

- Often have no symptoms
- Can live with an infection for decades without feeling sick
- Can be successfully treated with medications

### **How would someone know they have Hepatitis C?**

The only way to know if someone has Hepatitis C is to get tested. Doctors use a blood test, called a Hepatitis C Antibody Test, to find out if a person has ever been infected with Hepatitis C. People who test positive for hepatitis C antibody will be further tested for hepatitis C virus RNA or a PCR test to find out if the virus is still active.

### **What do the test results mean?**

When getting tested for Hepatitis C, ask when and how test results will be shared. The test results generally take several days to 1 week to come back.

#### Non-reactive or a negative Hepatitis C Antibody Test

- A **non-reactive**, or negative, antibody test means that a person does not have Hepatitis C.
- However, if a person has been recently exposed to the Hepatitis C virus, they will need to be tested again.

#### Reactive or a positive Hepatitis C Antibody Test

- A **reactive**, or positive, antibody test means that Hepatitis C antibodies were found in the blood and a person has been infected with the Hepatitis C virus at some point in time.

- A reactive antibody test does not necessarily mean a person still has Hepatitis C.
- Once people have been infected, they will always have antibodies in their blood. This is true if even if they have cleared the Hepatitis C virus.
- A reactive antibody test requires an additional, follow-up test to determine if a person is currently infected with Hepatitis C.

#### Hepatitis C virus RNA or PCR test

- A **negative** or not detected result means a person does not have active hepatitis C infection.
- A **positive** or detected result means a person has active hepatitis C infection and should be evaluated for liver damage and treatment.

### Where can I learn more?

Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis/> to learn about the risk of Hepatitis C for all adults.

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