

## Hepatitis C



The hepatitis C virus was discovered in 1989.

About 4 million people in the U.S. have **hepatitis C**, and 75% of them are baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1965). Most do not know they have it – or that they need to be screened for it.

Hepatitis C is a silent infection that can take years or decades before any symptoms show up. For 85 percent of people who have the virus, it becomes a chronic infection. It can lead to chronic liver disease, cirrhosis or liver cancer.

Getting treatment can add 20 years or more to a person's life. New medications can actually cure hepatitis C in most people who have the virus.

The only way hepatitis C spreads is through contact with blood.

Many people contracted hepatitis C during the 1970s and 80s. Boomers have more hepatitis C because they were born before the discovery of HIV-AIDS and the current strict blood precautions. At that time, people were more likely to be exposed to other people's blood.

You might have been exposed if you:

- Had a blood transfusion or worked around human blood before 1992
- Used IV drugs long ago
- Have been on dialysis for a long time

People are still being exposed today. Some of the ways are:

- Sharing needles for drugs
- Needle-stick accidents in the workplace
- Having sex with someone with the virus
- Being born to a mother with hepatitis C
- Getting tattoos in unregulated settings

Most hepatitis C cases start without symptoms.

When the liver inflammation gets worse, fatigue, pain in the joints or abdomen, itchy skin, sore muscles, dark urine, or yellow skin or eyes might develop.

Anyone who may have been exposed should ask his or her health care provider for a blood test.

Please call Wanda Nye RN FCM if you have questions.

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