



# What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a chronic liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV causes inflammation of the liver and can eventually lead to liver damage. Currently, there is no vaccination available to prevent HCV infection, but antiviral therapy is available to help clear the virus from the blood.<sup>1</sup>

- Unprotected sexual activity that includes contact with blood or an exchange of blood with an infected person.
- Being born to a mother with HCV.

Hepatitis C can be detected in the blood. If you think you are at risk for infection, speak to your health care provider who may suggest a blood test.

## How can you get Hepatitis C?

HCV is spread from person to person through infected blood. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada 70 to 80% of new infections are due to injection drug use (sharing needles and other drug-using equipment) and the most common risk factors for HCV infection include:

- Tattooing, body piercing when unsterile equipment or techniques are used.
- Needle prick injuries with contaminated equipment in the workplace.
- Exposure during medical or dental procedures that involve the use of contaminated equipment.
- Sharing personal care items with an infected person (razors, toothbrush, etc.).

## How to avoid Hepatitis C infection

According to Health Canada, Infection can be avoided by taking the following precautions:

- Not sharing needles or drug use equipment.
- Wearing latex gloves when coming into contact with another persons blood.
- Safer sex practices that include the use of condoms and avoiding blood to blood contact.
- Ensuring sterile equipment is used during tattooing or body piercing.
- Being tested for HCV before becoming pregnant.



