

Should you be tested for Hepatitis C?

Why should you be tested for Hepatitis C?

There are things you can do to fight hepatitis C. Early detection can help. Knowing your hep C status will help prevent transmission to others. Hep C is a curable condition for most people. Better treatments are available with fewer side effects. Even if you do not start treatment, there are a few things you can still do to keep your liver healthy, such as avoiding alcohol and getting vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (Hep C) is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C can lead to serious liver damage. Hepatitis C progresses slowly and often has no symptoms. Many people have hepatitis C and don't know it. The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

Get tested for hepatitis C if you...

- Injected drugs, even just once many years ago
- Were born from 1945-1965 (Baby Boomers)*
- Received donated blood or organs before 1992
- Received clotting factor before 1987
- Got a tattoo or body piercing from an unlicensed artist, such as on the street or while in jail
- Are HIV positive
- Were exposed to blood on the job through a needlestick or injury with a sharp object
- Were ever on long-term dialysis
- Snorted drugs

* In New York State, health care providers are required by law to offer anyone born between 1945 and 1965 a test for hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C Antibody Test

A Hepatitis C Antibody Test is a blood test that looks for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus. The test can be done by collecting a blood sample and sending it to a lab, or by a fingerstick using a hepatitis C rapid antibody test. The hepatitis C antibody test will tell you if you have ever been infected with hepatitis C. You may need a second test to know if you are currently infected.

Hepatitis C Antibody Test Results

If the test result is **NON-REACTIVE/NEGATIVE**

- A non-reactive or negative antibody test means that you are not currently infected with the hepatitis C virus.
- However, if you have engaged in risky behavior in the last 6 months, you will need to be tested again.
- Your non-reactive test result does not protect you from getting hepatitis C in the future.

If the test result is **REACTIVE/POSITIVE**

- A reactive or positive antibody test means that you have antibodies to hepatitis C in your blood.
- You were exposed to hepatitis C at one time. You are probably infected with hepatitis C.
- You will need a second test to know for sure.

Take the Second Test. Know for Sure.

- This second test is called an RNA test. Another name used for this test is a PCR test. The RNA test checks for hepatitis C virus in your blood.
- If you don't have the virus in your blood, this test will come back undetectable. If the test comes back detectable, then you have hepatitis C.

For a list of free hepatitis C testing sites in New York State go to: www.health.ny.gov/hepatitis

You had a rapid hepatitis C antibody test: Your result is reactive/antibody positive.

This means:

- You have antibodies to **hep C** in your blood.
- You were exposed to **hep C** at one time. You are probably infected with **hep C**.
- You need a second test to know for sure.

What to do next:

Find out if you have **hep C** infection.

- You need a second test to know if you have **hep C**.
- This second test measures **hep C** virus in your blood.
- If you don't have the virus in your blood, this test will come back undetectable. If the test comes back detectable, then you have **hep C**.
- Until you take the second test, assume you have **hep C**.

Be safe. Protect others.

- **Hep C** is spread mainly by contact with infected blood. Do not share needles, or any other injection equipment (cotton, cooker, etc.) or anything, including razors or other personal care items that may have blood on them.
- **Hep C** is not spread by casual contact like sneezing, hugging, or sharing eating or drinking utensils.

Make healthy choices. Help protect your liver.

- Avoid alcohol. If you have **hep C**, alcohol is your enemy.
- Make sure you are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Eat healthy (limit sugar, salt and fat), exercise and get enough rest.

See a doctor.

- A doctor can explain the results of your second test.
- If you have **hep C**, a doctor will monitor your health and liver regularly.
- Even if you don't have **hep C**, you should see a doctor on a regular basis.

Learn about **hep C** treatment.

- **Hep C** can be cured.
- With the medications available today, the length of **hep C** treatment is shorter now, more successful and has fewer side effects.
- Not everyone needs **hep C** treatment.
- You have time. Talk with your doctor and your family before making a decision about treatment.

Find out more about **hep C**.

- When you take the second test and know for sure, let's talk again.

Take the second test. Know for sure.

You had a rapid hepatitis C antibody test: Your result is non-reactive/antibody negative.

This means:

- You are probably not infected with **hep C**.
- Your non-reactive test result does not protect you from getting **hep C** in the future.

What to do next:

If you engaged in risky behavior in the last 6 months:

- Get tested again in a few months.
- It can take up to 6 months for your body to produce enough antibodies to be measured by the test.
- **Hep C** is spread by contact with infected blood. You are at risk for **hep C** if you had contact with infected blood within the past 6 months (shared injection equipment, had rough, unprotected sex, etc.)

Stay negative. Be safe.

Don't share.

- Do not share needles, or any other injection equipment (cotton, cooker, etc.) or anything, including razors or other personal care items that may have blood on them.

Think before you ink.

- Do not get tattoos, piercings or body art from places such as jails, on the street, or in someone's home. Instead, get them from a licensed artist.

Make healthy choices.

- Make sure you are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Eat healthy (limit sugar, salt and fat), exercise and get enough rest.
- Practice safer sex by getting tested and treated for any STDs and HIV, and using condoms or other barriers (dental dams, gloves).
- Even if you don't have **hep C**, you should see a doctor on a regular basis.

Find out more about **hep C**.

Stay Negative. Be Safe.

