

# Hepatitis C

## A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

### What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by infection with a virus. Some people have no symptoms or long-term effects from the infection. However, most individuals carry the virus for the rest of their lives and some develop serious liver damage. Treatment can cure hepatitis C, but it is lengthy, has side effects, and may not be suitable for all patients.

### How is hepatitis C spread?

- Usually by contact with the blood of an infected person
- injection drug use. If using drugs do not share or re-use needles
- To a baby during delivery by an infected woman (generally low risk)
- Having sex with an infected person (rare)
- Through transfusion of blood products (rare since 1991). Inform your doctor if you have ever received or donated blood.

### What will help me get better?

- Don't use alcohol – it accelerates liver damage in patients with hepatitis C.
- Eat well to help your liver heal.
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and/or B if you have had no previous infection or immunity .
- The value of herbal remedies remains unknown.

### How can I protect others from getting infected?

- Don't let others come in contact with your blood, e.g. a bloody nose or cut.
- Don't share needles or other equipment for intravenous drug use, tattooing or body piercing.
- Don't share spoons or straws for intranasal cocaine use.
- Don't share anything that might have blood on it, like a razor or toothbrush.
- Tell your health care providers, e.g. dentist or laboratory technician, that you are infected with hepatitis C.
- Tell your sexual partners, although you have a low chance of spreading the virus to them.
- Use condoms, especially for short-term sexual relationships and multiple partners.
- Use condoms during menstruation because of possible spread through blood.

### You cannot spread hepatitis C by:

- Coughing, kissing or hugging
- Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses

### If you are a mother carrying hepatitis C:

The risk of giving the virus to the baby through breastfeeding is very low  
Make sure that your baby is tested at 6 weeks and at one year

### For further information:

- Visit the Guidelines and Protocols Advisory Committee web site:  
[www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/msp/protoguides/gps/index.html#H](http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/msp/protoguides/gps/index.html#H) Look for Hepatitis
- Visit the BC Centre for Disease Control web site: <http://www.bccdc.org/topic.php?item=60>