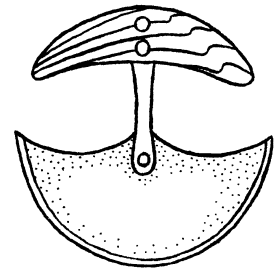


Information for Inuit Community Members

Fact Sheet 4 Hepatitis C and Inuit



WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a virus that attacks the liver. Over time, the liver can stop working properly and a person can become very sick and in many cases may die.

How do you get Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is transmitted mainly through contact with blood. People who inject drugs and share needles are at risk of getting the Hepatitis C virus. Also, people who get tattooed or pierced with dirty or shared equipment (such as ink pens) are also at risk for Hepatitis C. Remember: cleaning equipment with bleach and water may not kill the Hepatitis C virus. The Hepatitis C virus is very tough and can live outside the body (on needles or other equipment) for a long time.

Can I get Hepatitis C from Unprotected Sex?

The risk of getting Hepatitis C through unprotected sex is low, though in some cases, when there is bleeding (through tearing or menstruation) during sex, risk is high. Although the risk for Hepatitis C through unprotected sex may be low, the risk of other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as HIV and Chlamydia, are very high when you have unprotected sex. Using condoms during sex is a good way to reduce the risk of all STIs.

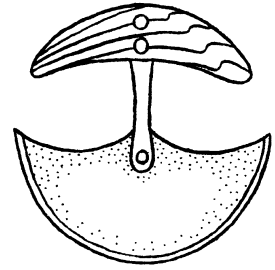
How is Hepatitis C treated?

Hepatitis C is treated with a combination of drugs called Ribavarin and Interferon, or sometimes just Interferon alone. These drugs are not a cure for Hepatitis C, but they can allow a person with the virus to live longer and with fewer signs of illness.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C?

Some of the symptoms of Hepatitis C are fatigue (tiredness), stomach pains, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes) and in extreme cases, partial or complete liver failure causing severe illness or death. Some people with Hepatitis C show no symptoms at all, therefore in many cases, people do not realize that they have Hepatitis C until they get tested. You cannot tell whether someone has Hepatitis C from looking at them.





What about Hepatitis A and B?

Hepatitis A and B are other types of Hepatitis virus that also attack the liver. Both are preventable by getting a vaccine and Hepatitis A and B are rarely fatal. However, if the viruses are left untreated, both can cause illness, and in combination with Hepatitis C, Hepatitis A and B can speed up the progression of illness and possible death.

How do I protect myself from Hepatitis C?

Don't share needles. If getting tattoos and piercings, make sure that the equipment is new or it has been completely sterilized in an autoclave (a professional equipment cleaner used by hospitals and tattoo parlours to kill HIV, Hepatitis C and other viruses and bacteria.) Do not have unprotected sex.

