

HEPATITIS C – WHAT TO LOOK FOR

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The Hepatitis C virus is a leading cause of chronic liver disease. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are about 71 million people with chronic hepatitis C infection. There are about 2.4 million people in the US according to the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR GETTING HEPATITIS C?

Exposure to re-used or unsterilized needles:

- Current or former needle drug users, including those who injected only once several years ago
- Prisoners
- People who have had tattoos or piercings

Exposure to poorly screened blood products:

- People who received blood transfusions, blood products or solid organ transplants before 1992

Exposure to HCV:

- People with known exposures to HCV, such as health care workers after needle sticks involving HCV-positive blood
- Chronic hemodialysis patients
- People with HIV infection
- People with sexual partners who are HCV-infected
- Children born to HCV-positive mothers

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C so preventing an HCV infection depends upon reducing the risk of coming in contact with the virus. Notify your doctor if you have any risk factors for HCV exposure. Screening is one of the best ways you can help prevent long-term complications of hepatitis C.

MEDICAL CARE & TREATMENT OPTIONS

Because HCV infection often does not have symptoms, persons with HCV may not know they are infected and may live with it for several years until symptoms develop. Screening for HCV allows for early detection and treatment for hepatitis

SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS C

Most often, an HCV infection does not have any symptoms. After exposure to HCV, it may take two weeks to 6 months for symptoms to appear.

COMPLICATIONS OF HEPATITIS C

Liver failure is known as cirrhosis and liver cancer. 15-30% of those with chronic HCV infection are at risk of developing cirrhosis within 20 years. Around the world, almost 399,000 die from cirrhosis or liver cancer.

HOW IS HEPATITIS C TRANSMITTED?

The most common way is exposure to infected blood through unsafe needles while using illicit drugs or a transfusion of unscreened blood. In the US, getting hepatitis C due to contaminated blood products has dropped due to better technology in blood screening. However, individuals born between 1945-1965 or the “Baby Boomers” is a group that could have been exposed to contaminated blood when less advanced methods were used.



The US Preventative Service Task Force (USPSTF) recommends a one-time screening for HCV infection to adults born between 1945 and 1965 and recommends screening for those at high risk for infection.

SOURCE(S): U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; World Health Organization; U.S. Preventative Services Task Force; Up-to-Date

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