



## Hepatitis C

### What is Hepatitis C?

The Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) causes an infectious liver disease known as “Hepatitis C” (“Hep C”). Often, there are no obvious symptoms seen with the disease, but long-term damage can result in liver failure, cancer, and liver cirrhosis of most people who are untreated. Cirrhosis is scarring of the liver, which prevents the liver from doing what it is meant to do:

- Filter and clean our blood
- Store vitamins and minerals
  - Store energy

### What Are the Symptoms?

Between 60% and 70% of infected individuals show **no symptoms** in the first 6 months. Some people show symptoms of:

- decreased appetite
- swelling of hands and feet
  - diarrhea
- fatigue (feeling tired)
  - abdominal pain
- jaundice (yellow skin)
- itching, bruising, bleeding
  - flu-like symptoms
  - cognitive impairment

### How Do You Catch Hepatitis C?

Infection can occur through sexual activity. Often, infection occurs via the bloodstream, (Ex. cuts or abrasions that come into contact with contaminated blood). More frequently, infection occurs when one uses contaminated needles.

You can be infected by:

- Getting a tattoo or body piercing with a used needle **or shared/ used ink**
- Sharing drug-works (Ex: straws for snorting, needles, spoons, water, cookers)
- Sharing personal items that come in contact with blood/abrasions (ex. razor, toothbrush, tweezers, nail clippers)
  - Fighting (if there is blood)
- A pregnant individual with Hep C may pass it to the fetus
  - If you had a blood transfusion before 1992

### **How Do I Know If I Have Hep C?**

The only way to test for Hep C is with a blood test. It is important to get tested early, because you have a better chance of getting treatment.

### **How Do I Get A Blood Test?**

Ask your physician to send you to give a small sample of blood. Blood testing is **confidential**, meaning only your physician and you will know the results.

To get tested in St. John's, tell your physician (or one of our physicians here at Planned Parenthood NL Sexual Health Centre). They will give you a "blood requisition" form which is a piece of paper you take to a blood lab. You can go to any lab you want during their hours of operation:

#### **Majors Path Blood Collection**

35 Majors Path (Bus 14)

(709)752-3658

Monday-Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm

#### **Health Sciences Centre (General Hospital)**

300 Prince Phillip Drive (Bus 10, 15, 16,23)

(709)777-6933

Monday-Friday, 8:00am- 2:45 pm

#### **St. Clare's Mercy Hospital**

154 LeMarchant Rd (Bus 11)

777-5494

Monday-Friday: 7:00am – 2:45pm

#### **Waterford Hospital**

Waterford Bridge Road (Bus 3, 6)

(709)777-3388/3389

Monday- Friday: 7:30am – 3:15pm

#### **Janeway Children's Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre**

300 Prince Phillip Drive

(709)777-4525

Monday-Friday: 8:00am – 4:00pm

### **How Can I Minimize My Risk?**

Currently there is no vaccine available against Hep C. But there are ways to protect yourself:

- New, sterilized needles should be used for EVERY injection. Drug works and personal items should not be shared. Condoms and safer sex practices (vaginal, anal, oral, etc.) can decrease the risk of infection by Hep C.
- Exchange needles for free at a needle exchange centre, like the *Tommy Sexton Centre, 47 Janeway Place, 8:30-12:30 + 1:30-4:30, Monday-Friday, (709)579-8656*
- Or **SWAP (Safe Works Access Program)** offers free delivery with a mobile unit on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Used needles are not required to get new ones. Private and confidential. (709)757-SWAP (7927)

### **How Common Is Hep C?**

- It is estimated that over 461, 000 Canadians have a history of Hep C. In many Aboriginal communities, the rate is much higher.
  - Globally, between 130 million and 150 million individuals are infected.

### **What Can I Do If I'm Infected?**

Approximately 51% of infected people can be cured. Treatment might include medication. Testing is free for Canadians. Between 10% and 60% of people get better on their own within 6 months. It's important to know if you are infected so that you and your physician can plan the best medical care possible for you.

## **Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!**

#### **Location:**

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

#### **Hours:**

Monday: 9am – 4:30pm  
Tuesday: 9am – 4:30PM  
Wednesday: 9am – 4:30pm  
Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm  
Friday: 9am – 4:30pm

#### **Phone:**

579-1009  
Toll Free: 1-877-NO MYTHS  
(1-877-666-9847)

#### **Website:**

[www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com](http://www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com)

#### **Email:**

[pp.nlshc@gmail.com](mailto:pp.nlshc@gmail.com)

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