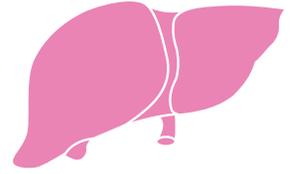


Just been diagnosed with...

Hepatitis C?



What does it mean?

HEPATITIS C is known as a blood-borne virus (BBV) and is carried in the bloodstream to the liver, where it can potentially damage the liver. Other blood borne viruses include hepatitis B and HIV.

The word '**hepatitis**' means **inflammation of the liver**, which can be caused by just one or many factors, e.g. viral infection, alcohol consumption or fatty deposits in the liver.

1 in 5 people infected with hepatitis C will naturally clear the virus. For the remaining 80%, they may be able to clear it through treatment. Either way it is possible to become virus-free.

How is hepatitis C passed on?

HEPATITIS C is sometimes referred to as just Hep C, or HCV (Hepatitis C Virus). It can be passed on by sharing or reusing other people's needles and syringes or through other equipment used to inject drugs. However, it can also be transmitted through unprotected sex, particularly where blood might be present, or from mother-to-baby during birth. Other sources include tattooing and piercing from inadequately sterilised needles, and blood transfusions before routine testing began in September 1991.

The virus is not spread by contaminated food or water, nor through social contact like hugging or holding hands. However the virus is highly infectious, and can be either acute (short-term) or chronic (persistent).

To prevent transmitting the virus to another person, it is vital that precautions are taken to ensure that no-one is at risk from contact with infected blood. It's worth knowing that hep C can remain 'live' in dried blood on surfaces for up to four days, and a few weeks inside a syringe. There is no vaccine for HCV.

Symptoms of hepatitis C

Symptoms of hep C can develop within 1-6 months (known as the incubation period) and can include: nausea, extreme tiredness, problems concentrating (brain fog), yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes, dark urine, pale stools, general feeling of being 'unwell' or a discomfort in the liver area. However, in most cases, it causes no noticeable symptoms until the liver has been significantly damaged. When symptoms do occur, they are often vague and can be easily mistaken for another condition.

HCV is diagnosed using a specific blood test. Often an HCV test is performed following an abnormal Liver Function Test (LFT) result, and/or the patient presenting with symptoms and risk factors. However, it is important to ask for a test if you feel you may be at risk.

Treating hepatitis C

Approximately 20% of all healthy adults will clear HCV within 6 months but most people go on to develop a chronic (long term) infection that can last for years and even decades if it is not treated. As part of the preparation for treatment, further blood tests are undertaken to determine the viral load (how much virus is in the bloodstream) and the genotype (as HCV comes in a number of subtypes).

The treatment of **chronic HCV** has greatly improved in recent years and the vast majority of people are now 'cured' with a course of antiviral drugs. The aim is to achieve a sustained virological response (SVR), which means that the virus is undetectable after completing treatment. A hepatologist (liver doctor) or an infectious disease doctor will usually advise on the best choice of treatment. More than 90% of people clear the virus with current therapy. In some cases, the liver may already be very badly damaged and cirrhosis (excess scarring) may have developed. If the liver starts to fail and antiviral therapy is ineffective, a liver transplant can be necessary in some cases. The new liver may also become infected but antiviral therapy remains very effective even after a transplant.

For everyone with chronic HCV, it is important to maintain general health and follow a healthy balanced diet. Becoming overweight or obese can worsen the liver damage. Similarly, alcohol consumption and smoking should be avoided as these factors can increase the risk and speed of developing cirrhosis (scarring of the liver). The liver will already be inflamed due to the HCV.

If you think you have been exposed to the Hep C virus, get tested. The treatment rates are improving all the time.

Get further support

www.hepcpositive.org.uk
www.liver4life.org.uk
 Call our helpline: 0800 074 3494

A little bit about us...

Hep C Positive, part of Liver4Life, aims to provide support and information to those people whose lives are affected by the Hepatitis C virus.

Liver4Life (L4L) is a charity dedicated to the prevention and early detection of liver conditions, liver disease and liver cancer. L4L offers education, information and support to any individual affected by a liver condition, at any stage of their disease, in the United Kingdom. Liver4Life also campaigns on behalf of all people with a liver condition to improve their care, their treatment and their support services.

www.liver4life.org.uk Liver4Life Helpline 0800 074 3494 (Mon to Fri, 10am to 4pm)
 To support Liver4Life, text 'LIVR49 £2' to 70070

