

## WHAT IS **HEPATITIS C**?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by infection with the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The virus is found in the blood of persons who have this disease and is spread by contact with infected blood.

## YOU SHOULD BE TESTED FOR **HEPATITIS C** IF:

- ◆ You had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992.
- ◆ You were treated for clotting problems with a blood product made before 1987.
- ◆ You have ever been on long-term kidney dialysis.
- ◆ You ever injected street drugs, even once many years ago.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE TESTED FOR **HEPATITIS C**?

If you test positive for hepatitis C, it is very likely that you have chronic (long-term) liver disease. You need to see a doctor to:

- ◆ Find out if you have liver disease and if you should be treated for it.
- ◆ Learn how you can protect your liver from further harm.
- ◆ Learn how you can prevent spreading HCV to others.

## For more information on hepatitis C:

Access our website at:  
[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)

Or call CDC's Hepatitis Information Line:  
**1-888-4HEPCDC, 1-888-443-7232**

Or write us at:  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Hepatitis Branch, Mailstop G37  
Atlanta, GA 30333

Or call the  
American Liver Foundation:  
**1-800-Go Liver (1-800-465-4837)**

Or  
Hepatitis Foundation International:  
**1-800-891-0707**

ASK YOUR DOCTOR  
IF YOU OR YOUR  
LOVED ONES SHOULD  
BE TESTED FOR

**HEPATITIS C**



# Thousands who had a life-saving blood transfusion before July 1992 may be at risk.



## But I don't feel sick.

Many persons who have hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well for many years. For some persons, the most common symptom is extreme tiredness. The only way to tell if you have been infected with HCV is to have an HCV blood test, which is *not* part of a routine physical.

## How serious is it?

If your HCV test is positive, your doctor should test you for liver disease. Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these persons have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick. Some persons with liver damage due to hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure, which may take many years to develop.

## Why did a transfusion put me at risk?

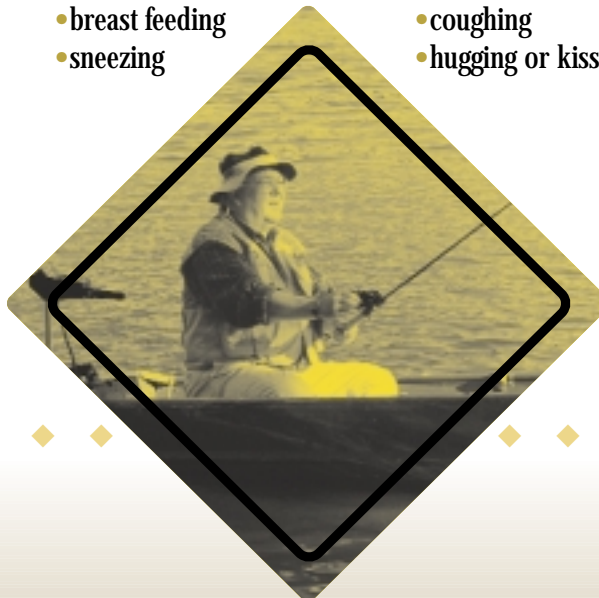
- ◆ You may have received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before tests for hepatitis C were available or when they were less precise than they are now.
- ◆ You were treated for clotting factor problems with a blood product made before 1987, when these products were treated to kill the virus.

## Who else is at risk?

The virus is spread by contact with infected blood. Others at risk of getting hepatitis C are persons who ever injected street drugs, persons who were ever on long-term kidney dialysis, health care workers exposed to blood in the workplace through accidental needlestick injuries, and babies born to infected mothers. HCV also can be spread by sex, but this does not happen very often.

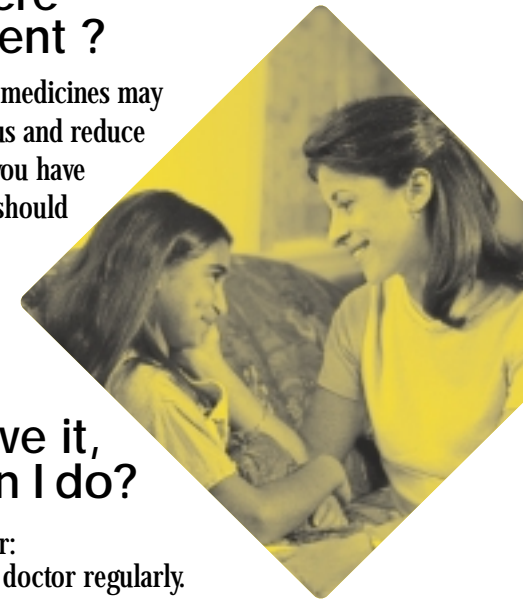
## HCV is not spread by:

- sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses
- casual contact
- breast feeding
- sneezing
- food or water
- coughing
- hugging or kissing



## Is there treatment ?

Current antiviral medicines may get rid of the virus and reduce liver disease. If you have hepatitis C, you should check with your doctor to see if treatment can help you.



## If I have it, what can I do?

Protect your liver:

- ◆ See your doctor regularly.
- ◆ Don't drink alcohol.
- ◆ Check with your doctor before starting any new medicines, including over-the-counter and herbal medicines.
- ◆ Get vaccinated against hepatitis A if you have liver damage.

Avoid spreading it to others:

- ◆ Don't donate blood, body organs, other tissue, or sperm.
- ◆ Don't share toothbrushes, needles, razors, or other items that may have blood on them.
- ◆ Cover cuts or sores.
- ◆ You do not need to change your sexual practices if you have one steady partner. Ask your doctor about this and whether your sex partner should be tested.

***T***here is no vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C.