

HEPATITIS C



Why People Born from 1945–1965 Should Get Tested

Why should people born from 1945-1965 get tested for hepatitis C?

People born from 1945–1965, sometimes referred to as baby boomers, are 5 times more likely to have hepatitis C than other adults. Hepatitis C can lead to liver damage, cirrhosis, and even liver cancer. Most people with hepatitis C do not know they are infected. Since many people can live with hepatitis C for decades without symptoms or feeling sick, testing is critical so those who are infected can get treated and cured.

While anyone can get hepatitis C, 3 in 4 people with hepatitis C were born from 1945–1965.

What should baby boomers know about hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis C virus. Some people who get infected are able to clear, or get rid of, the hepatitis C virus, but most people who get infected develop a chronic, or long-term, infection. Over time, chronic hepatitis C can cause serious health problems. In fact, hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver cancer and the leading cause of liver transplants. Treatments are now available that can cure hepatitis C.



CDC recommends that everyone born from 1945–1965 get tested for hepatitis C.

Why do people born from 1945-1965 have such high rates of hepatitis C?

The reason that people born from 1945–1965 have high rates of hepatitis C is not completely understood. Most baby boomers are believed to have become infected in the 1960s through the 1980s when transmission of hepatitis C was highest.

Hepatitis C is primarily spread through contact with blood from an infected person. Baby boomers could have gotten infected from medical equipment or procedures before universal precautions and infection control procedures were adopted. Others could have gotten infected from contaminated blood and blood products before widespread screening virtually eliminated the virus from the blood supply by 1992. Sharing needles or equipment used to prepare or inject drugs, even if only once in the past, could spread hepatitis C. Still, many people do not know how or when they were infected.

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U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
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Getting tested for hepatitis C

The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested. A blood test, called a hepatitis C antibody test, can tell if a person has ever been infected with the hepatitis C virus. This test looks for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus. Antibodies are chemicals released into the bloodstream when someone gets infected.

When getting tested for hepatitis C, ask when and how test results will be shared. There are two possible antibody test results:

- **Non-reactive, or a negative**, means that a person does not have hepatitis C. However, if a person has been recently exposed to the hepatitis C virus, he or she will need to be tested again.
- **Reactive, or a positive**, means that hepatitis C antibodies were found in the blood and a person has been infected with the hepatitis C virus at some point in time. A reactive antibody test **does not** necessarily mean a person has hepatitis C. Once someone has been infected, they will always have antibodies in their blood. This is true if even if they have cleared the hepatitis C virus.

A reactive antibody test requires an additional, follow-up test to determine if a person is currently infected with hepatitis C.



For more information

Talk to a health professional, call the health department, or visit www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis.