

## Hepatitis C

### Testing baby boomers saves lives

Hepatitis C is a serious virus infection that over time can cause liver damage and even liver cancer. Early treatment can prevent this damage. Too many people with hepatitis C do not know they are infected, so they don't get the medical care they need.

Once infected with the hepatitis C virus, nearly 8 in 10 people remain infected for life. A simple blood test, called a hepatitis C antibody test, can tell if you have ever been infected, but cannot tell whether you are still infected. Only a different follow-up blood test can determine if you are still infected. CDC data show only half of people with a positive hepatitis C antibody test had the follow-up test reported to the health department. The other half did not have a follow-up test reported, although some of them may have been tested. Without the follow-up test, a person will not know if they still have hepatitis C and cannot get the medical care they need.

#### **Baby boomers (people born from 1945 through 1965) can:**

- ◇ Ask your doctor, nurse, or other health care provider for a hepatitis C blood test.
- ◇ Encourage family and friends born from 1945 through 1965 to get tested for hepatitis C.

#### **Doctors, nurses and other health care providers can:**

- ◇ Test all baby boomers and people with other risks for hepatitis C.
- ◇ Make sure everyone who tests positive on the first test gets the follow-up test to find out if they are still infected.

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**Want to learn more? Visit**

[www http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns)

**3 Million**



About 3 million adults in the US are infected with the hepatitis C virus, most are baby boomers.

**3 in 4**

Up to 3 in 4 people who are infected don't know they have hepatitis C so they aren't getting the necessary medical care.

**1945–  
1965**



Baby boomers, anyone born from 1945 through 1965, should get tested for hepatitis C.

# Many baby boomers got infected before the dangers of hepatitis C were well known.

## Problem

### **Anyone can get hepatitis C, but adults born from 1945 through 1965 are 5 times more likely to have hepatitis C.**

- ◇ Hepatitis C is mostly spread through contact with an infected person's blood.
- ◇ Some people could have gotten infected before widespread screening of blood began in 1992.
- ◇ People who have injected drugs, even if only once in the past, could have been infected with the virus from sharing a needle or drug equipment with someone who had hepatitis C.
- ◇ Many people do not know how or when they were infected.

### **Hepatitis C causes serious liver disease, even liver cancer.**

- ◇ Most people with hepatitis C don't have any symptoms. If symptoms do appear, they can be a sign of serious liver damage.

- ◇ Hepatitis C can cause liver scarring and liver failure if left untreated.
- ◇ Hepatitis C is a leading cause of liver cancer.
- ◇ Successful treatment can get rid of hepatitis C from the body

### **Blood tests are needed to tell if you have hepatitis C.**

- ◇ A screening blood test, called an antibody test, shows if a person has ever been infected with the hepatitis C virus.
- ◇ If the antibody test is positive, a follow-up RNA blood test is needed to see if a person is still infected with the hepatitis C virus.
- ◇ A CDC study shows through health department reports that only 50% of adults who had a positive antibody test had a follow-up test reported. Without a follow-up test, people won't know if they are still infected with the hepatitis C virus.

## People Who Should be Tested

- Born from 1945 through 1965
- Have received blood products with clotting factor before 1987
- Have received blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
- Have ever injected drugs, even if only one time
- Have HIV
- Have been on kidney dialysis for several years
- Are health or public safety workers who have been stuck with a needle or other sharp object with blood from a person with hepatitis C or unknown hepatitis C status
- Born to mother with hepatitis C



SOURCE: CDC Recommendations 1998, 1999, and 2012

# Test Patients Born from 1945 through 1965 for Hepatitis C

Ask to be tested



**Baby boomers**  
Born from  
1945 through 1965

Test patients



**Doctors, nurses,  
and other health care  
providers**

**Blood test**  
for hepatitis C antibody



**- Negative -**

**No hepatitis C  
virus infection**

No further  
action needed

**+ Positive +**

**Follow-up RNA blood test**



for hepatitis C  
virus infection

**+ Positive +**

**Hepatitis C  
virus infection**

Refer for  
further evaluation

Connect to  
medical care



**- Negative -**

**No hepatitis C  
virus infection**

No further  
action needed

# What Can Be Done



## US government is

- ◊ Working together with many federal agencies to carry out the Strategic Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis. [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/hepatitis/actionplan\\_viralhepatitis2011.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/hepatitis/actionplan_viralhepatitis2011.pdf)
- ◊ Funding programs that support hepatitis C testing and getting people linked to care and treatment.
- ◊ Educating doctors, nurses, and other health care providers about hepatitis C, developing clinical tools and issuing updated guidance to help carry out recommended testing.
- ◊ Working with states and communities to improve reporting of hepatitis C test results in order to get people needed services.
- ◊ Increasing coverage under the Affordable Care Act so more people will have health insurance for testing and treatment.



## State and local public health departments can

- ◊ Let people know where they can get blood tests for hepatitis C.
- ◊ Follow-up with health care providers and laboratories for people who have a positive hepatitis C antibody test but have no record of a follow-up test.
- ◊ Monitor and report people with hepatitis C infection and promote best practices for testing and linking patients to care.



## Doctors, nurses, and other health care providers can

- ◊ Set up systems to make to make sure all patients born from 1945 through 1965 are tested for hepatitis C.
- ◊ Test patients with other risks for hepatitis C, including blood transfusions before 1992 or injection drug use.

- ◊ Make sure everyone who has a positive hepatitis C antibody test gets the follow-up blood RNA test and is linked to lifesaving care and treatment if infected.



## Baby boomers and all persons at risk can

- ◊ Ask their doctor, nurse, or other health care provider about getting tested for hepatitis C.
- ◊ Make sure to get a follow-up test if the antibody test is positive to see if they are still infected with the hepatitis C virus.
- ◊ To learn more about hepatitis, visit:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis>  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/RiskAssessment/>  
[http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepc\\_ez/](http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepc_ez/)



## People living with hepatitis C can

- ◊ Eat a healthy diet, stay physically active, see a doctor on a regular basis and ask if you could benefit from new and better treatments.
- ◊ Talk to your doctor before taking over the counter medicines and avoid alcohol because they can cause liver damage.
- ◊ Reduce the risk of transmission to others by not donating blood or sharing personal items that might come into contact with blood.

For more information, please contact

**Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)**

**TTY: 1-888-232-6348**

**E-mail: [cdeinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdeinfo@cdc.gov)**

Web: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333

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