

hepatitis C virus called *Genotypes*. The blood test will show what genotype you have. Your viral genotype will help inform your treatment options. You will also be offered a *Fibroscan* and an abdominal *Ultrasound* to show any scarring (*fibrosis*) or hardening of the liver (*cirrhosis*). Fibroscan and Ultrasound tests are both non-invasive and painless.

Your doctor and nurse will explain these tests to you, and help you to understand what the results mean. They will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you have, and can provide whatever information you need. They can also tell you about local help and support that is available for people living with hepatitis C.

Thinking about treatment

Effective treatments are available that can cure the infection in the majority of patients who complete a course. The newest treatments are a course of tablets taken over 8-12 weeks with very few side effects. You can discuss treatment options with your clinical team. If you decide to take treatment your doctor or nurse will make sure you have all the information and support you need. They will check how your body is responding to treatment, and how successful it is in clearing the virus.

How can I look after myself and others?

As hepatitis C is spread through blood to blood contact, there are simple ways to prevent spread:

- If you inject drugs, do not share any injecting equipment with other people. This includes needles, syringes, water, spoons and filters
- Do not share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers
- Cover cuts and grazes with a waterproof plaster
- Safely dispose of any blood-stained materials such as sanitary towels or tampons
- Consider using condoms during sex, and avoid having sex when a woman is having her monthly period

Sources of support and information

Finding out you have hepatitis C can be a difficult time for many people. It can raise a lot of questions and emotions. The following services provide information and support for people living with hepatitis C, as well as their partners and families.

Hepatitis C Trust

t: 0845 223 4424 (Helpline, Mon-Fri 10.30-16.30)
e: helpline@hepctrust.org.uk
w: www.hepctrust.org.uk

British Liver Trust

t: 0800 652 7330 (Free helpline, Mon-Fri 09.00-17.00)
e: info@britishlivertrust.org.uk
w: www.britishlivertrust.org.uk

Hepatitis Scotland

t: 0141 225 0419
w: www.hepatitisscotland.org.uk

Tayside Hepatitis Specialist Service

The Hepatitis Service is based at Ninewells Hospital, Dundee. Clinics are held at locations throughout Tayside. For more information on referral or clinics, contact the specialist nurses on:
01382 740 078



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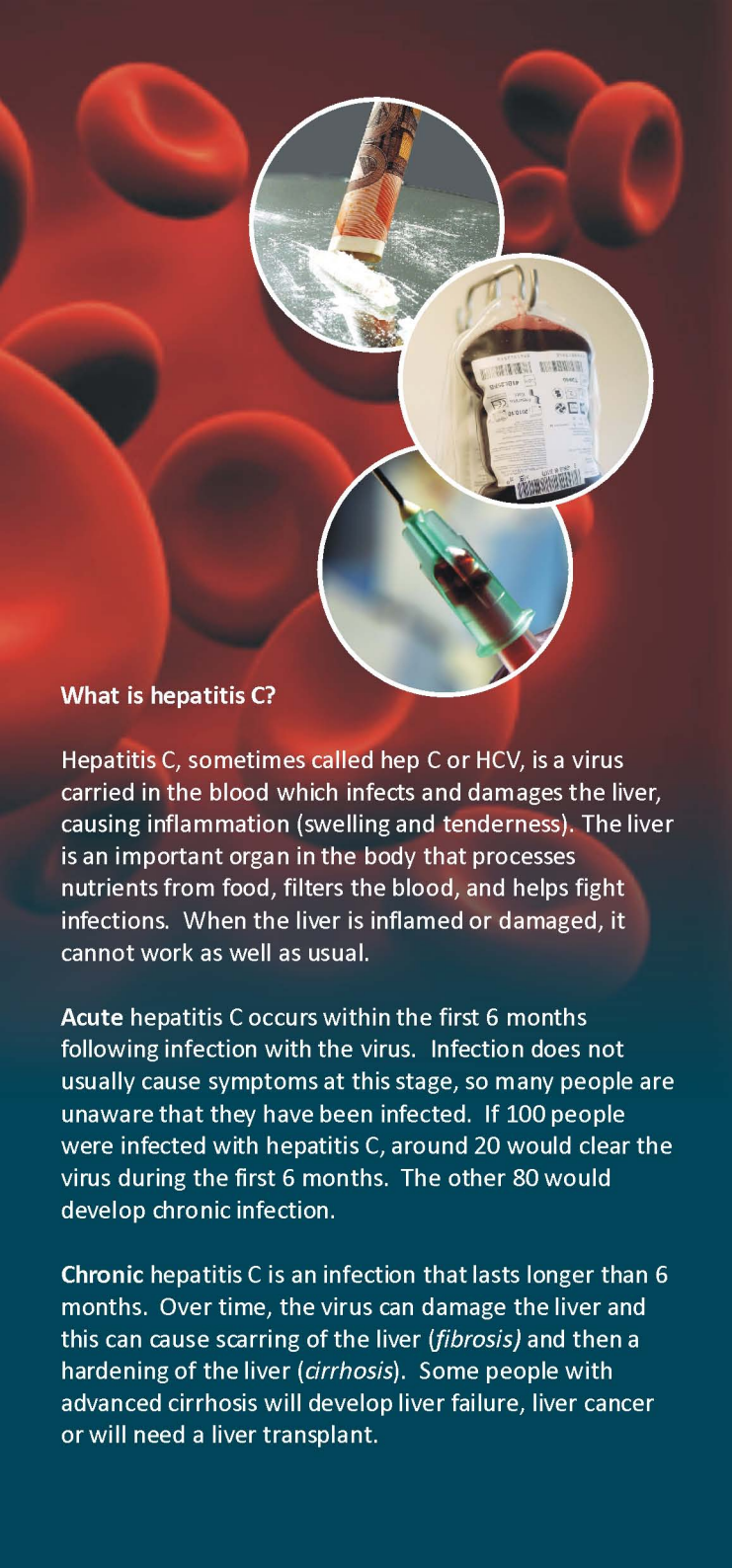
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Hepatitis C

Patient Information





What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C, sometimes called hep C or HCV, is a virus carried in the blood which infects and damages the liver, causing inflammation (swelling and tenderness). The liver is an important organ in the body that processes nutrients from food, filters the blood, and helps fight infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, it cannot work as well as usual.

Acute hepatitis C occurs within the first 6 months following infection with the virus. Infection does not usually cause symptoms at this stage, so many people are unaware that they have been infected. If 100 people were infected with hepatitis C, around 20 would clear the virus during the first 6 months. The other 80 would develop chronic infection.

Chronic hepatitis C is an infection that lasts longer than 6 months. Over time, the virus can damage the liver and this can cause scarring of the liver (*fibrosis*) and then a hardening of the liver (*cirrhosis*). Some people with advanced cirrhosis will develop liver failure, liver cancer or will need a liver transplant.

How is hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus (BBV); it is spread by blood to blood contact. Hepatitis C can be transmitted in the following ways:

Sharing equipment if you inject drugs including needles, syringes, filters, spoons or water

Receiving blood in hospital (blood product infusions) in UK before September 1991

Sharing straws or rolled bank notes to snort drugs

Mother to baby transmission

Working in an environment that may involve contact with infectious blood or body fluids containing blood

Medical or dental treatment abroad in countries where infection control procedures may be poor

Tattoos, piercings, acupuncture or electrolysis in unlicensed premises (such as prison, abroad etc)

Sharing personal items such as razors, hair clippers, toothbrushes, nail scissors and tweezers

Sex*



*The risk of sexual transmission of hepatitis C is low however it can be more common if bleeding occurs such as during anal or rough sex or when a woman has their period.

Hepatitis C **cannot** be transmitted through normal social contact. There is no risk to your friends and family from everyday activities like hugging and kissing, sharing toilets or sharing cups and plates.

Testing for hepatitis C

If you think you might be at risk of having hepatitis C, a simple blood test will tell you.

Most people in Tayside receive a Dry Blood Spot Test. This involves pricking your finger and spotting the blood onto a special piece of card that is sent to the laboratory to be tested for antibodies. If your test is reactive; this means you have had the hepatitis C virus at some stage, but you may not have a chronic infection. A second blood sample will be taken to see if the hepatitis C is still active (reproducing) in your system, this is called a PCR test.

If the PCR test is positive, this means you have chronic hepatitis C and your GP or other worker will refer you to the Hepatitis Specialist Service.

The good news is that effective treatments are available that can cure hepatitis C. Also, there are things you can do to help your liver and improve your health. If you have been diagnosed with hepatitis C infection we recommend that you attend clinical care appointments, consider treatment, and take steps to look after your liver and your general health.

What does clinical care involve?

Everyone with hepatitis C should be referred to Tayside Hepatitis Specialist Service. You will be cared for by a specialist team including doctors, nurses and pharmacists who are experts in hepatitis C. Your specialist team will tell you more about:

- Hepatitis C in general
- How healthy your liver is
- What you can do to look after yourself
- How to avoid passing on the virus to other people
- Your treatment options

At your first appointment you will be asked to give a blood sample for further tests that check the health of your liver and tell us how much hepatitis C virus is in your blood. There are a number of different strains or types of