

There is no vaccine for HCV

Hepatitis C cannot be transmitted through casual contact, hugging, kissing, sneezing, coughing and sharing of food, water or cutlery.

Treatment for Hepatitis C

All infected persons are to be seen by specialist physicians.

The treatment involves a combination of drugs. The treatment success depends on which type of HCV virus the patient has and how long they have had the infection.

Antiviral drugs may cause several side effects such as nausea, tiredness, depression, headaches, skin rashes and body aches.

Regular monitoring is needed to assess progress. If the infection is cleared the patient is not immune to hepatitis C. Pregnancy should be avoided whilst on treatment.

Contact tracing

If you are infected with Hepatitis C, you should inform all your sexual partners and people with whom you shared needles and drugs to get tested. If you do not want to inform your contacts yourself, a health professional can do it for you under strict confidentiality i.e. without mentioning your name.

Available help

- Family doctor (GP)
- Genitourinary clinic (GU clinic) on **21227 981**
- Detox Helpline on **2388 5301**
- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate on **2326 6000**
- www.sexualhealth.gov.mt

 **Health Promotion & Disease
Prevention Directorate**
5B, The Emporium, C. De Brocktorff Str., Msida MSD 1421 Malta.
Tel: 2326 6000, Fax: 2326 6104, www.ehealth.gov.mt

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Hepatitis C



PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR HEALTH



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Hepatitis C is a **bloodborne** viral infection that causes inflammation of the liver.

Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis C

- Short, mild, flu-like illness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Jaundice (when the whites of the eyes turn yellow, the skin becomes yellow, the urine is darker and the faeces are pale).
- Itchy skin

Approximately 20% of infected persons will clear the virus within 6 months and will have no long term consequences. However this does not mean that they are immune from future re-infection with the virus.

The remaining 80% of infected persons will develop chronic Hepatitis C infection which may cause symptoms or no symptoms at all. Such infected persons will carry the virus for the rest of their lives and will remain infectious and at risk to others. Complications such as liver cirrhosis and liver cancer may follow.

Incubation Period: (the time period between exposure to the virus and when the signs and symptoms are first apparent): from 2 weeks to 6 months. Usually 6 to 9 weeks.

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Diagnostic tests:

- Blood tests
- Liver function test
- Liver biopsy

How can you get infected with Hepatitis C?

- Sharing of drug-injecting equipment (needles, heating spoons and snorting equipment). This is the primary route of infection
- Sharing of shaving razors and toothbrushes of infected persons
- Using non-sterilised equipment for tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing



- Exposure to blood during unprotected sex with an infected person. Sexual transmission is an uncommon way of becoming infected with HCV

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- Coming into contact with a sufficient amount of infected blood. Such infected blood has to enter the body through a break in the skin
- Needle stick injuries in health care settings
- Contaminated and inadequately sterilized equipment used in medical and dental procedures
- Rarely from an infected mother to baby during childbirth.



Prevention

- Do not share needles, spoons or snorting practices for drug use
- Do not share shaving razors, toothbrushes or other personal belonging that involves contact with infected blood
- Always use condoms for sexual encounters
- Attend licensed tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing parlours.

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