



#37 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

## Get Tested for Hepatitis C

**If you have ever injected street drugs or have other risks.**

- Hepatitis C is a liver disease that can cause serious illness and death.
- It is most often spread by sharing needles or other injection drug equipment.
- There is no vaccine, but there is a test. Many infected people can be treated.
- An estimated 200,000 – 300,000 New Yorkers have hepatitis C.
- *Most don't know they are infected.*

- Available in Spanish, Chinese, and other languages: call 311 or visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)
- Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)
- 需要中文服務 - 可電 311 或造訪網址 [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)



## Hepatitis C Is a Serious Liver Disease

It is caused by a virus that spreads through infected blood.

- There are different types of hepatitis viruses, including: A, B, and C.
  - If you are infected with one type, you can still get the others.
  - Vaccines can protect against A and B, but *not* against hepatitis C.
- In some people, hepatitis C causes serious liver disease, such as cirrhosis or cancer. In time, some need a liver transplant.
- Many people with hepatitis C do not feel sick until liver damage is advanced, up to 10, 20, or even 30 years after infection.

## People at High Risk Should Be Tested

Get a hepatitis C test if you:

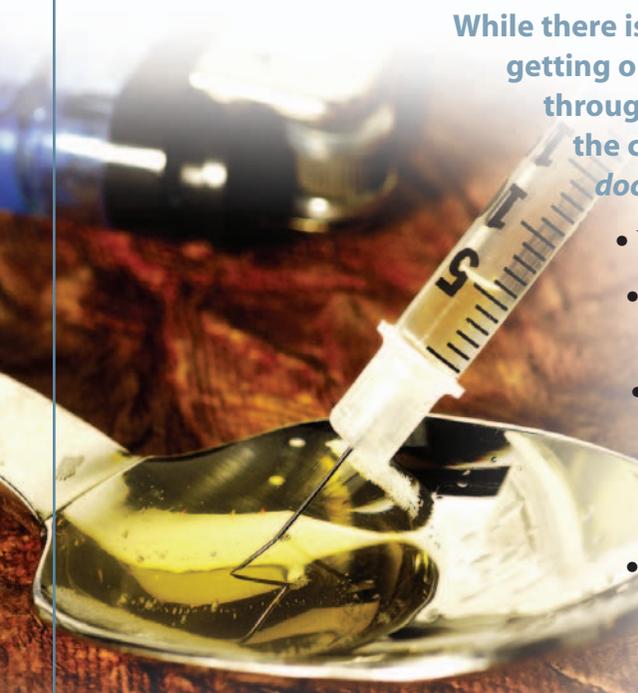
- Have *ever* injected street drugs, even once, many years ago.
- Have HIV infection.
- Received a blood transfusion, blood products, or organ or tissue transplants or donations (including cornea, skin, ova, sperm) before July 1992.
- Received clotting factor concentrates before 1987, or immune globulin products before 1995.
- Were ever on hemodialysis.
- Have liver disease.

The following people should also be tested:

- Health care workers and others after contact with hepatitis C-infected blood.
- Children over 1 year old born to hepatitis C-infected mothers.

**While there is a much lower chance of getting or spreading hepatitis C through the following activities, the chance is not zero. Ask your doctor if you should be tested if:**

- You have ever snorted cocaine.
- You have tattoos or body piercings.
- You have a long-term, steady sex partner who has injected street drugs or who has hepatitis C.
- You've had sexually transmitted diseases, or engage in sexual activities where blood may be present.



## How to Prevent Infection

The best way to protect against hepatitis C is not to inject street drugs. Even if you had hepatitis C infection in the past, protect yourself from reinfection:

- Get treatment to stop using drugs (*see More Information*).

### *If you do inject drugs:*

- Never share or reuse needles or works (cotton, cookers, water, cups, and ties). Use a new syringe every time (*see More Information* for syringe exchange programs).
- Split drugs with a new syringe, or split them in powdered form.
- Use a clean straw each time to snort drugs. Small amounts of blood on the straw may spread the virus.
- Get tattoos or body piercings only from a licensed professional. Make sure the person uses clean needles, tools, and ink and does not reuse them without proper sterilization.
- Avoid sharing toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care items that may have blood on them.



## Hepatitis C and HIV Together

Both viruses are spread by injection drug use.

- Hepatitis C spreads more easily than HIV and is *much more common*.
- Most people who get HIV from injection drug use have hepatitis C, too.

Having both diseases is *much worse than having only one*.

- Liver damage can be more serious and advance more quickly.
- When you have both diseases, each becomes harder to treat.

Protect against both HIV and hepatitis C.

- *If you have one disease, get tested for the other.*
- It's NEVER too late to protect your health, so NEVER share needles or works!

## If You Have Hepatitis C

- See your medical provider regularly, even if you don't feel sick.
- Get tested for HIV.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Talk to your provider before using any medicine (including over-the-counter and herbal medicines). High doses of acetaminophen (Tylenol) and some other non-aspirin pain relievers are toxic to the liver.

- **DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL.** It speeds up liver damage in people with hepatitis C (see **More Information** for help to stop drinking).
- Protect others against infection.
- *Never share needles or works.*
- Do not donate blood, sperm, body organs, or other tissue.
- Tell sex partners you are infected and discuss the risk (low, but not zero). To reduce the risk of sexual transmission, use a latex condom every time.
- Bandage cuts and open sores.
- Clean up blood right away.

**Medications can treat hepatitis C.**  
**Talk to your doctor.**



### More Information

- **NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) or call 311 and ask about hepatitis C
- **Free testing:** call 311 and ask for hepatitis C testing at STD Clinics
- **Help with alcohol or drug problems:** 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638), or call 311 and ask for LIFENET
- **Harm Reduction Coalition (syringe exchange programs):** 212-213-6376
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)
- **Hepatitis C Harm Reduction Project:** [www.hepcproject.org](http://www.hepcproject.org)
- **Hepatitis Foundation International:** [www.hepfi.org](http://www.hepfi.org)
- **Hepatitis C Support Project (HCV Advocate):** [www.hcvadvocate.org](http://www.hcvadvocate.org)

**DIAL  
311**

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Protect Yourself



At Risk?  
Get Tested



Hepatitis C

Ask Your Doctor



# Health Bulletin

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NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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**DIAL  
311**

**For Non-Emergency NYC Services**  
**Telephone Interpretation in 170 Languages**