

HEPATITIS C



WHAT IS IT?

Hepatitis C was identified in 1989. Before that time the infection was only identified as Non A, Non B Hepatitis.

Hepatitis C is a disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV), which infects the liver. The virus attaches itself to the body's healthy cells and forces them to make more of the virus. Antibiotics, which kill bacteria, are not effective against viruses.

When a person is first infected they have acute Hepatitis C. Approximately 20% of these people recover spontaneously the rest (80%) will develop chronic Hepatitis C. Both acute cases and chronic carriers can spread Hepatitis C by blood and body fluids.

It is important for people who have been diagnosed with Hepatitis C to be assessed by their family doctor and possibly referred to a liver specialist. The specialist will assess whether treatment is appropriate.

It is estimated that two-thirds of the new HCV infections in Canada are related to injection IV drug users sharing needles, syringes, swabs, filters, spoons, tourniquets and water. Thirty-five thousand people in Ontario could be dying of Hepatitis C and do not even know they have it.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- **Do not** share drug needles or drug related equipment
- Wear latex/vinyl or similar types of gloves if you are likely to be in touch with someone's blood
- People with multiple sexual partners should always practice safer sex by wearing condoms
- If you are getting a tattoo, having body piercing or acupuncture, check out the establishment for safe, clean practices - never use homemade equipment
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors or other personal items which may be contaminated with blood
- Cover open sores

Hepatitis C is not spread by casual contact such as shaking hands.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853 or visit www.healthunit.org

For more information: Hepatitis C Society of Canada - Compensation www.hepc.com

Hepatitis C – Get the Facts www.healthcanada.ca/hepc

Hepatitis C – Information for Health Professionals www.healthcanada.ca/hepc