

Your Pathway for Managing Hepatitis C (adults)

What is hepatitis C?

- A virus that harms the liver.
- Many people who have hepatitis C do not feel sick. It can take a long time for liver damage to cause symptoms.
- **Hepatitis C can be cured.**
- It is passed from blood to blood.
- Common ways to get it are sharing needles, other drug equipment, or tattoo/body-piercing equipment; being born or having medical care in countries with high rates of hepatitis C; blood transfusions in Canada before 1992; men who have sex with men (especially with many partners or HIV infection); and sharing personal care items (e.g. razor) with an infected person.

What is the hepatitis C patient pathway?

It is a map for you and your healthcare providers to follow. It makes sure the care you are getting for hepatitis C is safe and effective.

You and your healthcare providers may modify the pathway to best suit your healthcare needs. Community services may be available to help you to complete your treatment.

Depending on your other health conditions, or if your hepatitis C is difficult to treat, you and your healthcare providers may decide a referral to a specialist would be helpful.

1. Diagnosis of hepatitis C

- If you are at risk of hepatitis C, there are two blood tests that can be done.
 - The **antibody test** checks if you have ever been exposed. It will remain positive even if you are cured.
 - The **PCR test** checks if you have an active infection.
- If you have ongoing risk factors, your healthcare provider may recommend you repeat the test every year.

2. Other tests that may be done

- Blood tests to show if your liver has been damaged and to check for other conditions that affect your treatment.
- You may need a liver ultrasound depending on the results.

3. Planning for treatment

- If needed, you and your healthcare providers will arrange support services to help you complete treatment (e.g. income support, housing, harm reduction).
- If you do not already have health insurance, it will be arranged to pay for your treatment. There may be a waiting period before you can start treatment.

- Many people with hepatitis C do not feel sick and do not show symptoms for a long time. Even without symptoms, hepatitis C can cause severe liver damage over time.
- Treating hepatitis C means you cannot transmit the virus to others. It also makes you less likely to get sick from heart disease and liver cancer.
- **If you are at risk of getting hepatitis C again, it is important to get retested every year.**
- If you are worried about your liver health, talk to your healthcare providers.

You can get hepatitis C again, even after you have been cured.

See the second page of this handout to learn what you can do to reduce your risk of getting hepatitis C.

4. Treatment and confirming cure

- You will take pills for 8-12 weeks.
- It is important to take your pills every day until the end of treatment.
- 12 weeks after you finish your pills, you will get a blood test to make sure your hepatitis C has been cured.

What do I need to know about my symptoms and hepatitis C?

Working through the hepatitis C patient pathway can take several months:

- Your healthcare providers will ask you questions about your health to determine your risk of having hepatitis C.
- They will do a blood test to diagnose hepatitis C and identify health conditions that may affect your treatment.
- Before starting treatment, you and your healthcare providers will arrange any support services you may need to help you complete treatment. You will also work together to arrange insurance coverage for your treatment.
- If it is not the right time to start treatment (e.g. you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or you are not sure you will be able to stick with the treatment every day), you can delay treatment to a later time.
- Once you are ready for treatment, you will take pills for 8-12 weeks. It is important to take your pills every day.
- You will be retested 12 weeks after you finish treatment to be sure your hepatitis C was cured.

How can I reduce my chances of getting hepatitis C again?

- If you use drugs, use new equipment every time, including needles, syringes, filters, washes, water and cookers. Use your own pipe or stem, mouthpiece, and rolled paper or straws when smoking or snorting drugs.
- Talk to your friends and family about hepatitis C, and encourage them to get tested, especially if you share any risks for infection.
- Avoid sharing personal care items that might have blood on them (e.g. razor, nail clippers) with another person that has hepatitis C.
- If you get a tattoo or body piercing, be sure the provider has been inspected by public health and is using good infection control practices.

Seeing a specialist is only recommended if:

- Your healthcare provider does not feel comfortable treating hepatitis C.
- You have other health conditions (e.g. HIV, kidney failure, or hepatitis B) that make treatment more complicated.
- Your hepatitis C is not cured after treatment.

You can find more information in the great resources below:

- CATIE catie.ca
- Canadian Liver Foundation liver.ca
- MyHealth.Alberta.ca myhealth.alberta.ca
- *Search for Hepatitis C on all sites

Write any notes or questions you may have here:

Please provide feedback about this patient pathway by completing a short [survey](https://bit.ly/DHSCNSurvey) (bit.ly/DHSCNSurvey) or email us at Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca



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