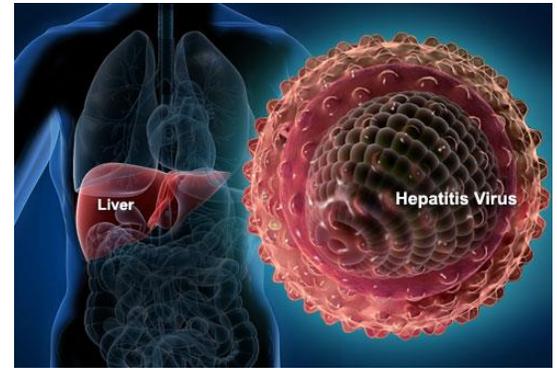


# Hepatitis

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can cause hepatitis. However, hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.



## Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. The virus is one of several types of hepatitis viruses that cause inflammation and affect your liver's ability to function.

You're most likely to contract hepatitis A from contaminated food or water or from close contact with someone who's infected. Mild cases of hepatitis A don't require treatment, and most people who are infected recover completely with no permanent liver damage.

Practicing good hygiene, including washing hands frequently, is one of the best ways to protect against hepatitis A. Vaccines are available for people most at risk.

*Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis A*, which typically don't appear until you've had the virus for a few weeks, may include:

- Fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain or discomfort, especially in the area of your liver on your right side beneath your lower ribs
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Loss of appetite
- Low-grade fever
- Dark urine
- Joint pain
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)



If you have hepatitis A, you may have a mild illness that lasts a few weeks or a severe illness that lasts several months. Not everyone with hepatitis A develops signs or symptoms.

## Causes

The hepatitis A virus, which causes the infection, usually is spread when a person ingests even tiny amounts of contaminated fecal matter. The hepatitis A virus infects liver cells and causes inflammation. The inflammation can impair liver function and cause other signs and symptoms of hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A virus can be transmitted several ways, such as:

- Eating food handled by someone with the virus who doesn't thoroughly wash his or her hands after using the toilet
- Drinking contaminated water
- Eating raw shellfish from water polluted with sewage

- Being in close contact with a person who's infected — even if that person has no signs or symptoms
- Having sex with someone who has the virus

## Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). For some people, hepatitis B infection becomes chronic, meaning it lasts more than six months. Having chronic hepatitis B increases your risk of developing liver failure, liver cancer or cirrhosis — a condition that causes permanent scarring of the liver.

Most people infected with hepatitis B as adults recover fully, even if their signs and symptoms are severe. Infants and children are more likely to develop a chronic hepatitis B infection. A vaccine can prevent hepatitis B, but there's no cure if you have it. If you're infected, taking certain precautions can help prevent spreading HBV to others.

*Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis B*, ranging from mild to severe, usually appears about one to four months after you've been infected. Signs and symptoms of hepatitis B may include:

- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weakness and fatigue
- Yellowing of your skin and the whites of your eyes (jaundice)

### *Causes*

Hepatitis B infection is caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). The virus is passed from person to person through blood, semen or other body fluids.

### *Common Ways HBV is Transmitted Include:*

- Sexual contact. You may become infected if you have unprotected sex with an infected partner whose blood, saliva, semen or vaginal secretions enter your body.
- Sharing of needles. HBV is easily transmitted through needles and syringes contaminated with infected blood. Sharing intravenous (IV) drug paraphernalia puts you at high risk of hepatitis B.
- Accidental needle sticks. Hepatitis B is a concern for health care workers and anyone else who comes in contact with human blood.
- Mother to child. Pregnant women infected with HBV can pass the virus to their babies during childbirth. However, the newborn can be vaccinated to avoid getting infected in almost all cases. Talk to your doctor about being tested for hepatitis B if you are pregnant or want to become pregnant.

### *Acute vs. Chronic Hepatitis B*

Hepatitis B infection may be either short-lived (acute) or long lasting (chronic).

Acute hepatitis B infection lasts less than six months. Your immune system likely can clear acute hepatitis B from your body, and you should recover completely within a few months. Most people who acquire hepatitis B as adults have an acute infection, but it can lead to chronic infection.

Chronic hepatitis B infection lasts six months or longer. When your immune system can't fight off the acute infection, hepatitis B infection may last a lifetime, possibly leading to serious illnesses such as cirrhosis and liver cancer.

The younger you are when you get hepatitis B — particularly newborns or children younger than 5 — the higher your risk the infection becoming chronic. Chronic infection may go undetected for decades until a person becomes seriously ill from liver disease.

### *Prevention*

Hepatitis B can be prevented by vaccine that is given in 2, 3, or 4 shots. The first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine is given at birth and will usually complete the series at 6–18 months of age. Most people who are vaccinated with hepatitis B vaccine are immune for life.



## Hepatitis C

Many BABY BOOMERS have HEP C, AND MOST DON'T EVEN KNOW IT.

Hepatitis C (HEP C) is a serious, blood-borne disease that has been under the radar. It's not talked about much, so even though it affects millions, many people don't know about it. It's almost been forgotten. People live with it for years or even decades with no symptoms, while Hepatitis C slowly damages their liver. By the time symptoms do appear, liver damage is often advanced. Left untreated, Hepatitis C can cause liver damage, liver cancer, and even death.

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that causes liver inflammation, sometimes leading to serious liver damage. The hepatitis C virus (HCV) spreads through contaminated blood.

Until recently, hepatitis C treatment required weekly injections and oral medications that many HCV-infected people couldn't take because of other health problems or unacceptable side effects.

That's changing. Today, chronic HCV is usually curable with oral medications taken every day for two to six months. Still, about half of people with HCV don't know they're infected, mainly because they have no symptoms, which can take decades to appear. For that reason, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends a one-time screening blood test for everyone at increased risk of the infection. The largest group at risk includes everyone born between 1945 and 1965 — a population five times more likely to be infected than those born in other years.

### *Symptoms*

Long-term infection with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) is known as chronic hepatitis C. Chronic hepatitis C is usually a "silent" infection for many years, until the virus damages the liver enough to cause the signs and symptoms of liver disease. Among these signs and symptoms are:

- Bleeding easily
- Bruising easily
- Fatigue
- Poor appetite
- Yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Dark-colored urine

- Itchy skin
- Fluid buildup in your abdomen (ascites)
- Swelling in your legs
- Weight loss
- Confusion, drowsiness and slurred speech (hepatic encephalopathy)
- Spider-like blood vessels on your skin (spider angiomas)

Every chronic hepatitis C infection starts with an acute phase. Acute hepatitis C usually goes undiagnosed because it rarely causes symptoms. When signs and symptoms are present, they may include jaundice, along with fatigue, nausea, fever and muscle aches. Acute symptoms appear one to three months after exposure to the virus and last two weeks to three months.

Acute hepatitis C infection doesn't always become chronic. Some people clear HCV from their bodies after the acute phase, an outcome known as spontaneous viral clearance. In studies of people diagnosed with acute HCV, rates of spontaneous viral clearance have varied from 14 to 50 percent. Acute hepatitis C also responds well to antiviral therapy.

### *Causes*

Hepatitis C infection is caused by the hepatitis C virus. The infection spreads when blood contaminated with the virus enters the bloodstream of an uninfected person.

Globally, HCV exists in several distinct forms, known as genotypes. The most common HCV genotype in North America and Europe is type 1. Type 2 also occurs in the United States and Europe, but is less common than type 1. Both type 1 and type 2 have also spread through much of the world, although other genotypes cause a majority of infections in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Although chronic hepatitis C follows a similar course regardless of the genotype of the infecting virus, treatment recommendations vary depending on viral genotype.

### *Complications*

Hepatitis C infection that continues over many years can cause significant complications, such as:

- Scarring of the liver (cirrhosis): After 20 to 30 years of hepatitis C infection, cirrhosis may occur. Scarring in your liver makes it difficult for your liver to function.
- Liver cancer: A small number of people with hepatitis C infection may develop liver cancer.
- Liver failure: Advanced cirrhosis may cause your liver to stop functioning.



**If you have any questions about this topic, please reach out to CompassionLink at [info@compassionlink.org](mailto:info@compassionlink.org). We will be happy to answer your questions.**

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