

What is Hepatitis?

easy read

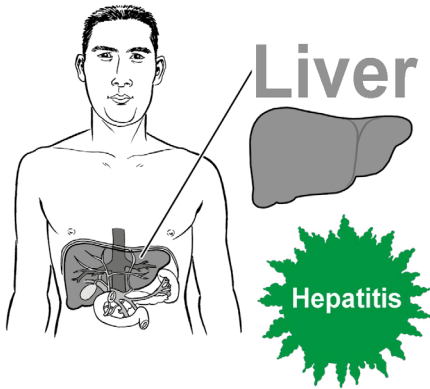


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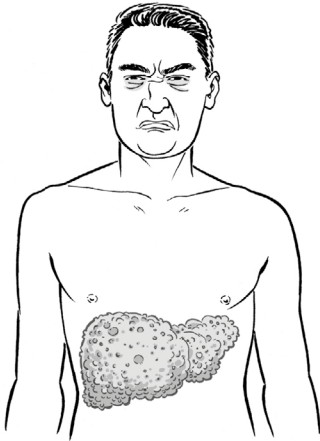
C



What is hepatitis?



Hepatitis is a disease that can seriously damage your liver and make you very ill if you do not get treatment.



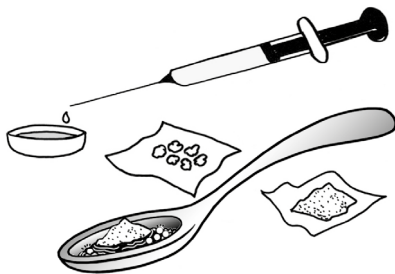
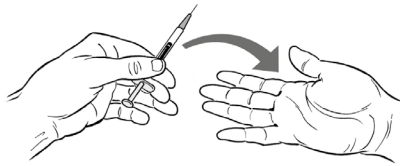
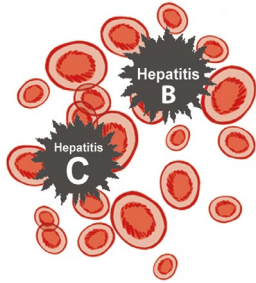
Some types of hepatitis will pass without causing lasting damage to the liver. Other types can last for many years and cause **cirrhosis** which is scarring of the liver.



There are different kinds of hepatitis caused by viruses that can be passed on from person to person in different ways.

This leaflet covers hepatitis B and C.

1. Who is at risk of hepatitis B and C?



Hepatitis B and C are viruses passed through blood to blood contact such as:

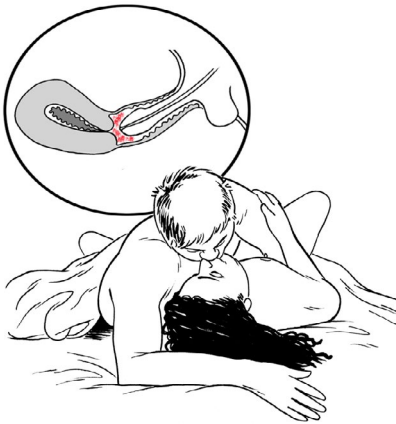
- Sharing needles or syringes for injecting drugs
- Sharing water, filter, spoons and other drug taking equipment



- Sharing snorting equipment for taking drugs.

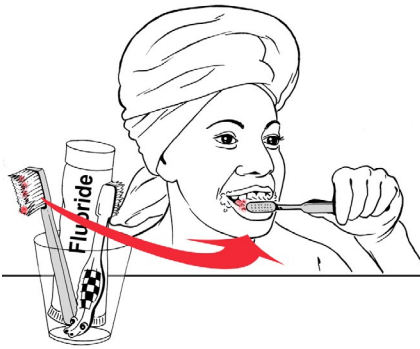


- Sharing needles for tattooing, acupuncture and body piercing with unclean equipment



Hepatitis B and C are also passed through body fluids such as semen and vaginal fluids, so can be passed through:

- Sex (where blood might be present)



- Sharing toothbrushes (because of bleeding gums)



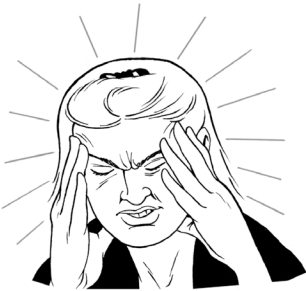
- Sharing razors (because people may have cut themselves)



- Medical treatment or Tattooing, acupuncture and piercing in foreign countries such as India, Africa, Central and South America, the Far East and Eastern Europe

How do I know if I have hepatitis B or C?

Most people will not have any symptoms at first.
Some people may experience signs of liver failure
such as:



Headaches



Feeling sick



Being sick



Muscle and joint pain, a
high temperature (fever)
of 38C / 104F or more



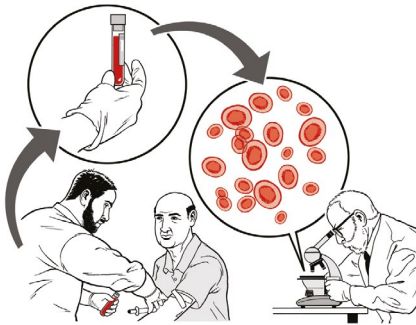
Sometimes a yellowing of
the eyes and skin. This is
called **jaundice**



Not everyone who has hepatitis will get symptoms they can see. The virus can harm your liver even if there are no signs.

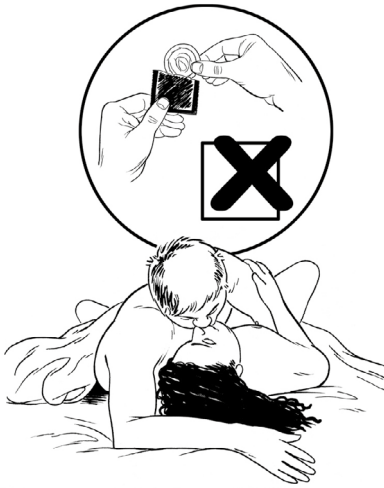


It is important to think carefully about whether you may have been at risk, even many years ago. If you think you might have been at risk you should get tested.



If you do have the virus and do not get treatment you could risk getting chronic liver disease.

The difference between hepatitis B and C



Hepatitis B can be passed on through having unprotected sex with a person who is infected. Hepatitis C is much less likely to be passed on in this way unless blood is present.



Hepatitis B can also be passed on from mother to baby. Your midwife will test you in pregnancy and the baby can be offered vaccines to prevent this.



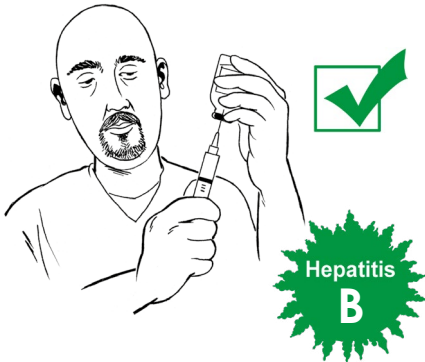
Neither virus is easily spread through day to day contact. You cannot get hepatitis B or C by shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, sharing food or by using the same toilet.

Treatment for hepatitis B and C

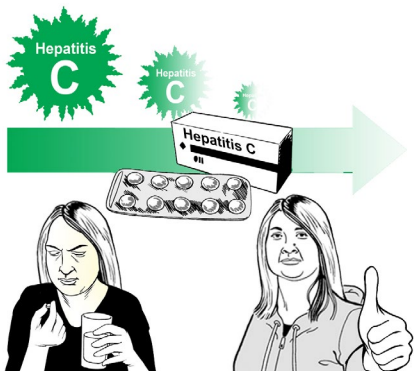


There are different treatments for the two viruses:

Hepatitis B can be controlled with treatment.



There is also a vaccine to protect people at risk from hepatitis B, but not for hepatitis C.

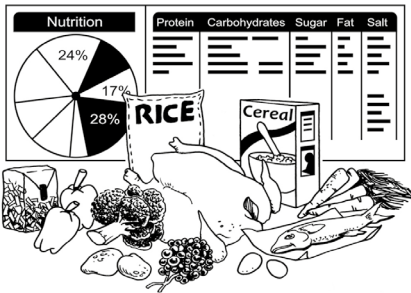


With the right treatment hepatitis C can be cured in many cases.



You should get tested for hepatitis B and C if you think you have been at risk.

Living with hepatitis



If you have hepatitis B or C it is important to have a healthy lifestyle to help you to stay well.





Alcohol, smoking, and eating fatty foods can make liver disease worse.



Being overweight or extreme dieting and eating too little also has a bad affect on your liver. Try to keep a healthy weight.



Try to avoid drinking too much alcohol and to stop smoking.



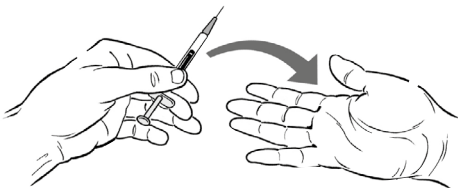


Ask a nurse or doctor for advice on how to do this.



Ask your doctor about other vaccines, like the annual flu jab that you should have.

How can I stay safe and free of hepatitis?



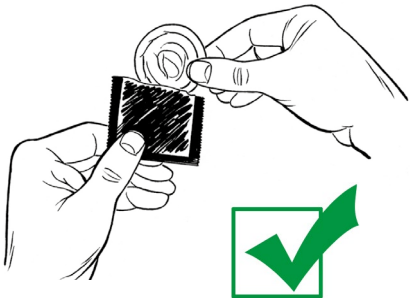
- **Never share needles, syringes, spoons or filters with other drug users.**



- **Do not share bank notes or straws to snort drugs.**



- **Avoid fighting and do not bite other people.** Any activity that draws blood can put you at risk.



- **Use a condom during sex:** including anal and oral sex.



- **Get vaccinated** for hepatitis B if you think you may be at risk.

If I am worried, what do I do?



It is important to know if you do have hepatitis so that you can get the right medical help you need to stay well.

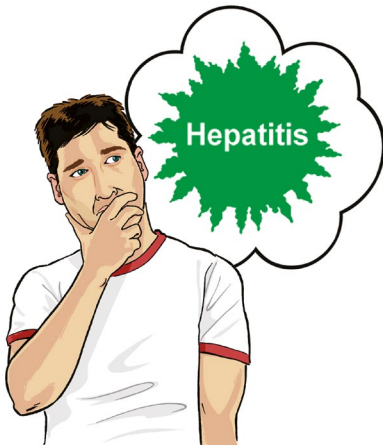
If you are worried that you might have hepatitis see your doctor.



Knowing for certain that you have hepatitis means you can be extra careful not to pass it on to the people you are close to.



HIV can be passed on in the same ways as hepatitis B and C. Ask your doctor to test you for HIV as well as hepatitis B and C if you think you are at risk. Treatment for HIV is very good and can keep you well.



If you are worried about hepatitis the following organisations can give you advice and information:

The Hepatitis C Trust

www.hepctrust.org.uk

helpline@hepctrust.org.uk

Helpline:

 **020 7089 6221**

THE HEPATITIS  TRUST



The Hepatitis B Foundation

www.hepb.org.uk
admin@hepb.org.uk


Helpline:

 **08000 46 1911**

The British Liver Trust

www.britishlivertrust.org.uk
info@britishlivertrust.org.uk

Information line:

 **0800 652 7330**

Information and support



If you have any questions, you can talk to your GP or nurse.



Sexual health/Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM)

clinics provide free, confidential advice. For further information, contact details and opening times please see:



www.sexualhealthni.info/gum-clinics-northern-ireland



Positive Life NI - supports and promotes positive living for people with and affected by HIV in Northern Ireland

www.positivelifeni.com/

Helpline:

 **0800 137 437**



For information on drug and alcohol treatment services throughout Northern Ireland:

www.services.drugsandalcoholni.info/treatment-support



Northern Ireland Hepatitis B and C Managed Clinical Network provides information on hepatitis B and C.

www.hepbandcni.net



Public Health Agency

www.publichealth.hscni.net



This leaflet is also available as PDF from:
www.publichealth.hscni.net and
www.hepbandcni.net



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