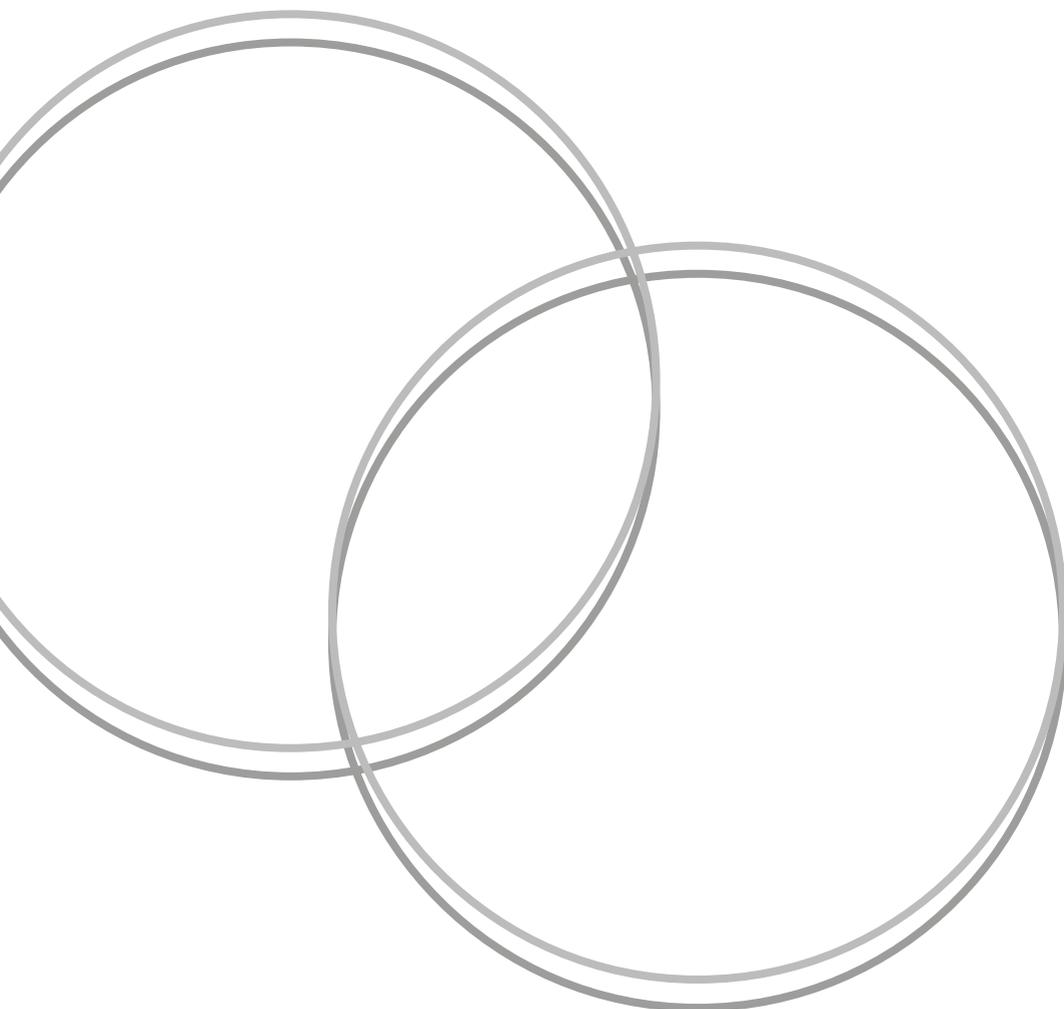




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Hepatitis C

Information for patients



Hepatitis C is a virus (HCV) that can be found in blood and blood products and can damage the liver.

It is transmitted mainly through contact with infected blood but is present in other body fluids.

Those at risk of having hepatitis C include:

- Current or previous injecting drug users.
- Those from countries where hepatitis C is more common.
- Anyone who had a blood transfusion before 1991 in the UK.
- Anyone who has had medical or dental treatment abroad.
- Anyone who has a tattoo or piercing which was done using unsterilised equipment.
- Those who share razors, toothbrushes or drug paraphernalia with an infected person.

Sexual transmission of HCV is thought to be low, but risks increase if:

- You are a man who has sex with men.

There is a low risk of passing from mother to baby (between 2 and 8%) or between heterosexual couple and no special precaution needs to be undertaken.

Symptoms

Many carriers of HCV have few or no symptoms and can often be unaware of their diagnosis for many years. Some symptoms of infection include:

- Fatigue.
- Weight loss.
- Loss of appetite.
- Abdominal pain.
- Difficulty concentrating or poor memory (sometimes described as 'brain fog').

Testing

The following tests can be done to see if you have hepatitis C:

- **Antibody** – a positive hepatitis antibody test means you have been exposed to the virus at some point but may not still be infected.
- **PCR test** – establishes whether the virus is still present and needs treating.

Treatment

Approximately 15 to 20% of people can clear the virus themselves without the need for medical treatment.

If treatment is required, it involves taking a course of tablets for approximately 12 weeks.

Current treatment has a 95% success rate of clearing the virus completely. You will be supported throughout your treatment by a liver specialist nurse or pharmacist.

You will need to have a blood test 3 months after the completion of treatment to check whether the treatment has been successful, and the virus has cleared. **Even if you clear the virus, it is important to note that you will always test positive for HCV antibodies which means that you have had the virus at some stage in your life.**

Reinfection

Even if you are successfully treated or manage to clear the virus yourself, it is still possible to become reinfected if you expose yourself to the virus again.

Being treated or clearing the virus on your own does not give you protection against getting the virus again.

If you feel that you remain at a continued risk of infection you should have a yearly HCV PCR test to ensure that you have not become reinfected.

Contacts

Oxford

Hepatology Nurses Office Number:

Telephone: 01865 222 057

Further information can be found at:

Website: www.hepctrust.org.uk

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Senior Hepatology Nurse
April 2024
Review: April 2027
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



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