

How can hepatitis C be prevented?

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. The best way to keep from getting the hepatitis C virus is to avoid any contact with blood. This includes not sharing needles, razors, or toothbrushes. Blood banks now screen donated blood for hepatitis C virus, so your risk of getting infected from a blood transfusion is extremely low. You can also get hepatitis C from sex with an infected partner; using a condom may reduce your risk of becoming infected.

To prevent the spread of hepatitis C:

- ✦ If you shoot drugs, never share works with anyone. Don't share cocaine or other snorting straws, since these can get blood on them too. Find out about treatment programs that can help you stop using drugs.
- ✦ Use a latex condom every time you have sex.
- ✦ Only get tattoos or body piercings from places using sterile equipment.
- ✦ Health care workers and people who clean up in hospitals or places where needles or sharps are used should follow standard (universal) precautions for every patient.
- ✦ If you have hepatitis C, don't share razors or toothbrushes.
- ✦ If you have hepatitis C, don't donate blood, sperm, or organs.

What about other kinds of hepatitis?

There are several different kinds of hepatitis viruses. If you have had one type, you can still get any of the others. The hepatitis A virus is spread by feces (stool) through close personal contact or contaminated food and water. Even a very small or not visible amount of feces can carry this virus. There is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis A infection. The hepatitis B virus is spread through blood and body fluids, like semen. There is also a vaccine to protect you from hepatitis B infection. If you have hepatitis C, ask your doctor about getting vaccinated for hepatitis A and B. Blood tests can be done to see if you have been exposed to the different types of hepatitis viruses.

Where can you get more information?

- ✦ Call your doctor, nurse, or health clinic
- ✦ Call your local board of health, listed in the phone book under government
- ✦ Contact:
 - The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)
Division of Epidemiology and Immunization, at
(617) 983-6800, or visit the MDPH hepatitis C website at
<http://www.masshepc.org> or the MDPH general website at: <http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/dph/>
 - The Hepatitis Hotline, at
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at
1-888-4HEPCDC (1-888-443-7232) or the CDC website at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/hepatitis.htm>