

HEPATITIS C

Reportable to local or state health department

**This fact sheet is for provider information only.
If you have questions, please call the health department.**

It is rare for children to be infected with hepatitis C, the exception may be those children infected by their mothers during childbirth and children who received blood products before July 1992. Most persons infected with hepatitis C develop lifelong infection (chronic infection). While children infected with hepatitis C may be attending childcare or schools, spread of hepatitis C in these settings has not been documented.

CAUSE	Hepatitis C virus.
SYMPTOMS	Young children infected with hepatitis C would most likely not have symptoms. Only 20% of adults have symptoms when first infected. These symptoms may include fatigue, abdominal pain, and jaundice (yellowing of eyes or skin). Adults may not have symptoms until after 10 to 30 years of chronic (lifelong) infection.
SPREAD	Virus is present in the blood and other body fluids that may contain blood. It can be spread person to person when blood from an infected person enters an open cut of another person or by sharing equipment to inject drugs or puncture the skin, such as tattooing or body piercing. Sexual transmission can occur but is less likely. Hepatitis C is not spread by kissing or casual contact. Spread among household contacts is uncommon. The risk of spread from an infected mother to a newborn is low.
INCUBATION	It takes from 2 weeks to 6 months, usually about 6 to 7 weeks, from the time a person is exposed to hepatitis C virus until disease occurs.
CONTAGIOUS PERIOD	As long as the person has hepatitis C virus present in the blood. About 80% of persons who get hepatitis C will have lifelong (chronic) infection.
EXCLUSION	<u>Childcare and School</u> : None, unless the hepatitis C-infected child has oozing sores that cannot be covered or bleeding problems. A team of medical experts should assess on a case-by-case basis to determine whether exclusion from some activities is necessary.
DIAGNOSIS	Hepatitis C can be diagnosed through blood tests. Persons exposed to blood or bloody body fluids from an infected person should call their healthcare provider immediately regarding blood testing.
TREATMENT	There is no vaccine to protect against hepatitis C. People infected with hepatitis C should be vaccinated against hepatitis A, and all children should be vaccinated against hepatitis B.

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PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Cleaning and disinfecting of blood and body fluid spills: (See pg 35.)
 - Surfaces and objects contaminated with blood or bloody body fluids must be cleaned with soap or detergent and water and then disinfected immediately. Hepatitis C virus, as well as other infectious germs, may be found in blood and other bloody body fluids of any person, even when there are no symptoms to suggest infection is present.
 - Wear disposable medical gloves when handling blood (nosebleeds, cuts) or items, surfaces, or clothing soiled by blood or bloody body fluids, or when there are open sores, cuts, or abrasions on the hands.
 - Wash hands immediately after contact with any body fluids, even if gloves have been worn. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- DO NOT allow sharing of toothbrushes, nail clippers, or razors.
- Encourage students and staff to do self-care when appropriate.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.