

**This leaflet gives general advice. For further information please ask either the nursing or medical staff who are providing your care and treatment or contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team on 01386 502552.**

If you would like this leaflet in a different language, larger print size, in audio, Braille or any other format please contact the

PALS team by phone on

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**Worcestershire  
Health and Care**  
NHS Trust



## **HEPATITIS C**

***What is it?***

***Your questions answered***

**An Information Leaflet  
for  
Patients and Staff**

## WHAT IS IT?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Viruses are the most common cause, but drugs, changes in the body's immune systems and excess alcohol can also cause Hepatitis. Hepatitis C is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The majority of people do not show symptoms or become jaundiced when they first pick up the infection. The rest may have any of the following symptoms:

- A short mild flu-like illness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin and whites of eyes, darker yellow urine and pale faeces)
- Itchy skin

It is estimated that around 15-20% of infected people clear their infections naturally within the first 6 months of infection. For the remainder, Hepatitis C can lead to chronic liver disease.

## IS IT INFECTIOUS?

Yes. The virus can be spread by sharing contaminated needles or other drug injection equipment with a carrier of the virus, by using non-sterilised equipment for tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing, by having unprotected sex with someone who is infected and through blood transfusion in countries where blood is not tested for this virus. All blood transfusions in the UK are tested. On rare occasions transmission from an infected mother to baby may occur, mainly during delivery.

## WHAT IS THE INCUBATION PERIOD?

This can be anything from 2 weeks to 6 months but most commonly is 6 – 9 weeks. (Time from exposure to symptomatic infection.)

## CAN YOU TEST FOR HEPATITIS C?

Screening tests for Hepatitis C virus have only been available since 1989. To determine active infection further special tests will be necessary.

## CAN TRANSMISSION BE PREVENTED?

Yes. All cuts and breaks on the skin should be covered with a waterproof dressing.

When dealing with blood and other body fluids which might contain blood, carers should protect themselves by using the appropriate protective clothing, i.e. vinyl or latex gloves and a plastic apron (face protection if splashes to the eye/face are likely).

- Safer sex (using condoms) will help prevent the spread of Hepatitis C.
- In Health Care settings all donated blood is checked for the virus. Sterile needles and syringes are used for all injections.

## IS THERE ANY TREATMENT?

Some people who suffer an acute attack of Hepatitis C make a complete recovery without treatment. Others who have infection for longer may need treatment in specialist units.

## HOW SOON CAN A PERSON RETURN TO WORK/THE CARE SETTING?

Hepatitis C is not transmitted in normal social situations and a person can return as soon as they feel well. The only exceptions are when Hepatitis C carriers who are healthcare workers are involved in performing exposure prone invasive procedures. Advice must be sought from Occupational Health departments.