

**Department of Corrections  
Health Services**

**PATIENT EDUCATION – HEPATITIS C (HCV)**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Q. What is Hepatitis C?

A. Hepatitis C is a virus (HCV) that can cause liver disease. The virus is found in the blood and liver of infected people and lives in the liver for many years. Most people who have HCV do not get serious liver disease. But about 15% to 20% of infected people do develop cirrhosis and liver failure after several decades of infection.

Q. How could a person have gotten Hepatitis C?

A. HCV is spread primarily by direct contact with human blood. For example, you may have gotten infected with HCV if:

- You had a blood transfusion prior to 1992.
- You once injected street drugs, and the needle and/or other drug “works” used to prepare or inject drugs had someone else’s blood that contained HCV on them.
- If you have ever had sex with a person infected with HCV.
- You lived with someone who was infected with HCV and shared items such as razors or toothbrushes that might have had his/her blood on them.

Q. How can persons infected with HCV prevent spreading HCV to others?

A. Do not share personal items that might have your blood on them such as toothbrushes, dental appliances, nail clippers, or razors.

- Cover your cuts and skin sores to keep from spreading HCV.
- Don’t have unprotected sex.
- Don’t share needles, tattoo or body piercing equipment.

Q. How can people protect themselves from getting hepatitis C and other diseases spread by contact with human blood and body fluids?

A. Don’t ever shoot drugs. If you do shoot drugs, stop and get into a substance abuse program. Never reuse or share syringes, water (used for injections) or drug “works”.

- Do not get a tattoo or any body piercing.
- Remember a HCV can be spread by sexual activity, but at a very low rate.

Q. What can persons with HCV infection do to protect their liver?

A. Stop using all alcohol.

- Stop using all street drugs.
- Don’t take over-the-counter, herbal, or other medications without your doctor’s knowledge.
- Avoid being overweight.

- Consider other measures your doctor may recommend (iron reduction and vitamin E).

Q. What other information should you be aware of?

A. HCV is not spread by sneezing, coughing, food or water, sharing eating utensils, or drinking glasses, or by casual contact.

- A person can be re-infected, as prior infection does not give protection against a different strain.
- Your doctor will make medical decisions based on your medical status and the *Department of Corrections has a "Management Plan" it will follow for our evaluation.*