

# Hepatitis: Silent but Treatable

## DID YOU KNOW...

**Hispanics are 70 percent more likely to die from viral hepatitis than whites.**

Finding and treating hepatitis **early is easy.** Treatment of hepatitis C has been found to **be as effective in Hispanics as it is in Whites.**

Untreated, hepatitis **can lead to death.**



## WHAT IS HEPATITIS?

- Hepatitis is a disease of the liver that can lead to illness and death.
- Your liver is important for staying healthy because it is responsible for storing nutrition, removing waste products, and filtering your blood from alcohol and drugs.
- In the United States, hepatitis is usually caused by infection with one of three viruses commonly referred to as Hep A, Hep B, and Hep C. Hep E is uncommon in the U.S.
- Infection with Hep B or Hep C can lead to cancer.

## IMPORTANT FACTS

- A blood test will show if you have hepatitis.
- Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent liver damage and death.
- Hepatitis is usually caused by a virus, but not the same virus that causes other ailments, flu or colds.
- Hepatitis viruses are not HIV or AIDS, but are spread in the same way.
- Excessive alcohol use can lead to fatty liver disease and alcohol hepatitis.

## RISK FACTORS FOR HEPATITIS

**HEP A**, also known as Hepatitis A virus (HAV), can be passed on if you eat food or drink water that has the virus in it. Usually this is from dirty water or raw fish. People generally get well in less than six weeks with no liver damage.

**HEP B**, also known as Hepatitis B virus (HBV), can also be spread from direct through direct contact with infected blood and body fluids, including saliva. Hep B can also be spread by unprotected sexual contact and it can be passed to a baby at birth from the mother.

**HEP C**, also known as Hepatitis C virus (HCV), is spread through blood and body fluids. The most common way to get infected with HCV is through injection drug use. You can get Hep C by having unprotected sex, sharing drug needles, and getting body piercings or tattoos that use dirty ink or needles. You can even get Hep C and Hep B by sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers with someone who has this condition.



## WHAT DOES NOT CAUSE HEPATITIS?

- You cannot get Hep C or Hep B by touching sweat, urine, or tears.
- You cannot get Hep C or Hep B from sneezes or coughs.
- You cannot get Hep B or Hep C through blood transfusions because of safety improvements in blood donations since 1992.

## WHY SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR HEPATITIS?

- Most people do not feel sick until the virus causes severe liver damage, which can take 10 or more years.
- Thousands of Americans get hepatitis each year.
- More people die from hepatitis than from HIV or AIDS.
- A blood test will show if you have hepatitis, and early diagnosis and treatment can prevent liver damage.
- People born from 1945 to 1965 are called baby boomers. They are much more likely to have Hep C than people born before or after those years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all baby boomers be tested.

## HOW DOES HEPATITIS AFFECT LATINOS?

- In 2009, Latinos were diagnosed with Hep A two times as much as non-Hispanic Whites and among all ethnic groups in 2013, Hispanics had the second highest rate of Hep A.
- Latinos 40 and over are more likely to contract Hep B than younger people.
- Viral hepatitis is two times the cause of death for Latinos than for Whites.
- The number of Hispanics with hepatitis C (2.6%) is higher than the number of people with hepatitis C in the general population (1.3%).
- Latinos show more liver scars than non-Hispanic Whites, and that is very dangerous.

## WHERE CAN I GET TESTED?

- You can get tested at your doctor's office. Most public health offices will test for hepatitis.
- See your doctor right away if you think you have been in contact with someone who has hepatitis.
- The next time you see a doctor, ask to get tested for hepatitis.
- In many instances, you can get tested for free.

## PREVENTION, VACCINATIONS AND TREATMENT

- Avoid risky behaviors such as excessive alcohol use, intravenous drug use, getting tattoos from unlicensed places and sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, needles, razors or nail clippers with someone who has hepatitis.
- Hep A can be prevented through vaccinations.
- Hep B can be prevented through vaccinations. Babies are often vaccinated against Hep B before they even leave the hospital.
- There is no vaccination for Hep C but it can be treated.
- If you test positive for hepatitis and have not been treated in the past, you should ask for treatment now—today's treatment options are easier than in the past.

## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

To find out more, visit a health professional. Information is available online:

[NHITunderserved.org/Hepatitis.html](http://NHITunderserved.org/Hepatitis.html)

[www.nastad.org/domestic/viral-hepatitis](http://www.nastad.org/domestic/viral-hepatitis)

[www.caringambassadors.org](http://www.caringambassadors.org)



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