



NEW
YORK
STATE

Department
of Health

Hepatitis C and Pregnancy



What is hepatitis C?

A growing number of young people have hepatitis C, a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus.

The hepatitis C virus can be spread through contact with the blood of someone who has hepatitis C. This happens most often when:

- sharing equipment for injecting drugs.
- getting a tattoo or body piercings from an unlicensed tattoo artist or piercer.

The risk of getting hepatitis C from sex is low. However, the risk increases if you:

- have sex with many people
- have a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- have rough sex
- have HIV

If you have hepatitis C and become pregnant, the virus can be passed to your baby during pregnancy and childbirth.

You can't get hepatitis C by kissing, hugging, touching, or sharing food.



Hepatitis C can be cured.

Left untreated, hepatitis C can cause serious health problems for you and your baby.

Good news! There is treatment to cure hepatitis C. It is easy to take. Most people have few to no side effects.

Testing is the first step to getting treated and cured for hepatitis C.

If you have hepatitis C, it is best to be treated before you become pregnant.



Thinking about having a baby?

Don't wait to get tested. Ask to be tested, treated, and cured for hepatitis C before you get pregnant.

Everyone age 18 and older should be tested for hepatitis C at least once. This is especially important if you ever injected or snorted drugs, even once.

While you get treated for hepatitis C, make a birth control plan that works for you. Some hepatitis C treatments may interact with hormones, including birth control pills. Talk with your health care provider about your options.

Treating and curing hepatitis C will protect you and your future baby.



Already pregnant?

All pregnant people should be tested for hepatitis C during each pregnancy.

If you learn you have hepatitis C, talk to your prenatal care provider about your diagnosis.

It is important that you and your future baby get the care you need. Regular checkups can help spot possible problems during your pregnancy, prevent problems during delivery, and help keep you and your baby healthy.

Your provider may choose to avoid certain tests and procedures to reduce the risk of passing the virus to your baby.

Talk with your health care provider about the possible risks and benefits of hepatitis C treatment. Studies are ongoing about the safety of treatment during pregnancy. Together, you and your health care provider can decide when is best for you to start treatment.



Know your hepatitis C status.

Most people with hepatitis C have no symptoms and don't know they have it.

The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get tested.

There are two-steps to hepatitis C testing. Your health care provider may run both tests using blood from one sample. Testing is most often done by collecting a blood sample and sending it to a lab.



Get tested.

Step 1: Hepatitis C antibody test

This test looks for hepatitis C antibodies. These are the body's attempt to fight the virus. The hepatitis C antibody test will tell you if you have ever had hepatitis C. It cannot tell if you have hepatitis C now.

If you get a nonreactive or negative antibody test, this means you do not have hepatitis C. However, if you have shared injection drug equipment in the last 6 months you will need to be tested again.

If you get a reactive or positive antibody test, this means you have antibodies to hepatitis C in your blood. You were exposed to hepatitis C at one time. You may have hepatitis C. You need a diagnostic test to know for sure.

Step 2: Hepatitis C diagnostic test

The hepatitis C diagnostic test checks for hepatitis C virus in your blood. This test is also called a ribonucleic acid test or RNA test.

If your result is undetectable or negative, this means you don't have the virus in your blood. You do not have hepatitis C.

If your result is detectable or positive, this means that hepatitis C virus was found in your blood. You have hepatitis C. You should talk to your health care provider about treatment.

If you learn you have hepatitis C.

Talk with your health care provider about when is best for you to start treatment.

Until then, take steps to stay healthy and protect your liver.

- Stop or cut back on drinking alcohol.
- Make sure you are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Eat healthy, exercise, and get enough rest.
- Ask your health care provider before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medicines, supplements, or vitamins.



Breastfeeding and hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C is not found in breast milk.

You can safely breastfeed your baby even if you have hepatitis C. Hepatitis C is found in your blood. So, if your nipple cracks or bleeds, stop feeding with that side until it heals. Nurse your baby with your other side. If you need to bottle-feed your baby for a while, consider pumping and throw away the milk. This will help you maintain your supply of milk. Ask your provider about support for breastfeeding.

But, breastfeeding is not recommended if you also have HIV or if you are being treated for hepatitis C.

Little is known about breastfeeding while taking hepatitis C medication. Therefore, avoid breastfeeding if you are taking hepatitis C treatment. Talk to your health care provider about postponing hepatitis C treatment until you wean your baby.



Your baby and hepatitis C.

If you had hepatitis while pregnant, it's possible your baby will be born with the virus. Left untreated, hepatitis C may cause health problems as your child gets older.

Talk to your baby's pediatrician about your hepatitis C diagnosis and the need to test your baby. This will help your baby get proper follow-up testing and care.

Testing your baby.

Testing is the only way to know if your baby has hepatitis C.

Ask your baby's pediatrician about hepatitis C testing during a well-child visit. Your baby will need a blood test to check if they have the virus in their blood. This test is called a hepatitis C diagnostic or RNA test. Testing should be done when your baby is between the ages of 2 and 6 months.

If your baby is diagnosed with hepatitis C, they can be treated and cured when they reach 3 years of age. Until then, it is important that you take your baby to the pediatrician for regular checkups. They will keep track of your baby's liver health.



For more information about hepatitis C visit:
health.ny.gov/hepatitisC

**To find help for pregnant and parenting
people, call the Growing Up Healthy Hotline:**

1-800-522-5006

TTY: 1-800-655-1789



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