

TREATMENT

New medicines are now available to cure hepatitis C.

These medicines, known as direct-acting antivirals (or DAAs), cure hepatitis C for over 95% of people.

- Treatment consists of 1 to 3 tablets taken daily for 8 to 12 weeks. This will depend on which medicine is being used and if there is any liver damage.
- Side effects from the hepatitis C treatment are uncommon, usually mild, and get better with time. Side effects may include nausea, headache, and feeling tired.
- GPs can now prescribe the new DAA medicines, but in some cases they may refer to a specialist if they are concerned about other health problems.
- The new medicines are available through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for people over the age of 12 with an Australian Medicare card.
- Treatment is available for people who are currently injecting drugs, people in prison, people with liver damage, and people who have been cured of hepatitis C before.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I'VE BEEN CURED?

A blood test done 3 months after finishing treatment will show if the virus is gone.

It is possible to get hepatitis C again once cured, so prevention is still important.

HEPATITIS INFOLINE

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Free & Confidential

TasCAHRD

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The Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis, and Related Diseases receives funding from the Crown through the Tasmanian Department of Health.

This information is general in nature and not intended as medical advice.

Consult your doctor for further information.

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WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus that causes inflammation of the liver.

Untreated hepatitis C can damage liver cells, causing scar tissue. This is called fibrosis.

If scarring continues, the liver will develop cirrhosis. This scar tissue will prevent the liver from working properly.

Untreated hepatitis C increases the risk of liver cancer and liver failure.

SYMPTOMS

Often, people with hepatitis C do not have any symptoms until their liver is already damaged, which can take many years.

If there are symptoms, they could include:

- Fatigue and sleep problems
- Fever and flu-like symptoms
- Aches and pain, including in the liver area (behind ribs on the right side of the belly)
- Changes in mood, including anxiety, depression, and irritability
- Low appetite and nausea
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes)

ABOUT YOUR LIVER

Your liver is the largest organ inside your body and performs many important functions

- Makes, stores, and releases sugars and fats
- Produces essential proteins and enzymes
- Clears the blood of waste and toxins
- Releases chemicals to help break down food
- Stores and supplies vitamins, minerals, and iron

It is also the only organ able to repair itself from mild damage.

HOW DO YOU GET HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is transmitted when the blood of someone living with hepatitis C gets into someone else's blood. Even a very small amount of blood can transmit hepatitis C.

Risks include

- Sharing injecting equipment
- Unsterile tattoo & piercing procedures
- Medical & dental procedures in developing countries
- Blood transfusions in Australia before 1990

Lower risk

- Needle stick injuries
- Blood to blood contact in fights
- Sharing razors and toothbrushes
- During childbirth
- Sexual contact when blood is present

Hepatitis C IS NOT transmitted by

- Sneezing and coughing
- Hugging, handshakes and casual contact
- Kissing
- Toilets
- Sharing food or eating utensils
- Insect and animal bites

TESTING

The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to have a blood test. Hepatitis C tests are not part of routine blood testing - you have to ask. GPs and Nurse Practitioners can organise these tests.

Testing for hepatitis C may require two different blood tests. They are free for people with a Medicare card.

ABOUT THE TESTS

Hepatitis C antibody tests show whether you have ever been exposed to the hepatitis C virus. Having hepatitis C antibodies means you have the virus now, or had it in the past.

People who clear the virus (25% of adults) and those who have previously been cured will always have hepatitis C antibodies.

Having hepatitis C antibodies does not mean you currently have hepatitis C, and the antibodies do not protect you from getting hepatitis C again.

If you test positive for hepatitis C antibodies, an RNA test, sometimes called a PCR test, will then be done. RNA tests show whether you currently have the hepatitis C virus and how much of the virus you have.

You can ask your doctor about ordering 'reflexive hepatitis C testing' to reduce the number of blood draws and appointments needed.

Once hepatitis C enters the body, it can take up to 12 weeks before hepatitis C antibodies are produced.

It is important to consider this when getting tested. Tests done too early may not be accurate.

Even though hepatitis C may not show up on tests during this time, it can still be transmitted to others.

