

Have you ever...

- a** Pranged your mate's car?
- b** Pulled a sickie after a night out on the lash?
- c** Injected drugs at a party?

Hepatitis **C** Get tested. Get treated.

Have you ever...

- a** Haggled a bargain in a Moroccan market?
- b** Ordered a grasshopper starter in Thailand?
- c** Got a piercing or a tattoo after a sleepless night in Goa?

Hepatitis **C** Get tested. Get treated.

For further copies visit www.orderline.dh.gov.uk
Crown copyright 2009. 292320 1p 200K Jan 09 (BEL)
Produced by COI for the Department of Health

NHS

Hepatitis C

Are you at risk?

Hepatitis **C** Get tested. Get treated.

If you've answered 'c' you may be at risk

Hepatitis C - Your questions answered

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a virus that can damage the liver. Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine to protect against hepatitis C, but effective treatment is available.

How could I get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is carried in the blood. The virus is mainly spread through contact with the blood of a person who has hepatitis C. You can't catch it through everyday contact such as holding hands or hugging and kissing, or through sharing toilets, plates, cups or kitchen utensils.

Hepatitis C can be passed on in the following ways.

By sharing equipment for injecting drugs, even if you only did this once or twice, or a long time ago.

Through a blood transfusion (before September 1991), or blood products like clotting factors (before 1986). All blood in the UK is now screened for hepatitis C.

Hepatitis C can also be passed on in the following ways, although these are less common.

From a mother with hepatitis C to her baby, before or during the birth.

Through unprotected sex (without a condom) with someone who has the virus.

By having a tattoo, an ear piercing, a body piercing or acupuncture with equipment that is not sterile.

During medical or dental treatment abroad in countries where hepatitis C is common and where equipment may not be sterilized properly.

By sharing razors or toothbrushes which have been contaminated with blood from someone who has the virus.

See your doctor or nurse if you think you could have been in contact with the virus in any of these ways.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who have the hepatitis C virus have no signs or symptoms for many years. But even if you have no symptoms, you may be developing liver damage and can still pass the virus on to others.

How might the virus affect me in the long term?

Around one in four people who become infected with hepatitis C will get rid of the virus naturally. However, most people who become infected will have it for a long time, and are at risk of developing severe liver damage (cirrhosis) after many years. In some people, cirrhosis can lead to liver cancer or liver failure.

Where can I get a test?

Your GP will be able to test you for hepatitis C. Local drug agencies and sexual health clinics (sometimes called genito-urinary medicine clinics) may also offer testing.

Is treatment available?

A form of drug therapy is available that is effective, on average, in more than half of the people treated.

How can I help myself if I have the virus?

If you have the virus, stop drinking alcohol or reduce the amount of alcohol you drink. This is the most important thing you can do to reduce the damage to your liver.

How can I avoid becoming infected or passing on the virus to others?

Don't start injecting drugs.

Stop injecting drugs if you can.

If you cannot stop injecting drugs, then **never** share drug-injecting equipment. This includes needles, syringes, and anything else that might be contaminated with blood.

Don't help others to start injecting.

For friendly, confidential drugs information and advice 24 hours a day, talk to FRANK. FRANK is the name of the helpline that is part of the national drugs campaign which aims to give advice and help to anyone who is affected by, or wants to know about, drugs. Phone 0800 77 6600 or visit www.talktofrank.com

If you are considering getting your ears pierced, or having any body piercing, a tattoo or acupuncture, check that all the equipment such as needles and ink pots are sterile and not being used more than once.

If you, or your sexual partner, have hepatitis C, there is a small risk that it could be passed on during sex. Condoms reduce the risk and will also help to protect you against unwanted pregnancy, HIV and many other sexually transmitted infections.

Don't share razors or tooth brushes as they could have blood on them.

If you need medical or dental treatment abroad, make sure that any medical equipment is sterilised or is taken from a sealed pack. Only have treatment if it's essential. If you need a blood transfusion, ask for screened blood.

Information and support

If you have any worries or questions, you can talk to your doctor, nurse or call the Hepatitis C Information Line on 0800 451 451. Textphone 0800 0850859. You can also visit the NHS hepatitis C website: nhs.uk/hepc