

Bottom line.

There are millions of people walking around with nasty infectious diseases. Although it's wise to protect yourself around this person you've learned has hepatitis C, it's wiser to assume *everyone* has an infectious disease. *Including yourself.* Don't forget the number of people who don't even know they're infected. Use standard precautions (assume everyone has an infectious disease and act accordingly) and treat everyone's blood and body fluid as if it was infected with something.

This can sound scary and overwhelming, but after giving it some thought, you'll start to make it a habit and soon it will seem a simple matter of common sense. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns. We'll do our best to help you.

One more thing: An individual's medical information is considered private. Please remember that the person who handed you this brochure has shared something very personal and would like for you to respect his or her privacy.



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SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS HEPATITIS C

Are you in danger?



There are about 170 million people in the world infected with the hepatitis C virus. When you add other chronic, viral infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, herpes, CMV and hepatitis B, the number of people who have had or currently live with one of these diseases gets closer to half the global population.

From 40 to 90 percent of these people don't even know they have an infectious disease, and of those who do know, most keep the information within the family. As you learn about hepatitis C and how to protect yourself against it, don't forget to use what you learn with all people in all situations. You don't know who might be infected with one of these diseases – and sometimes neither do they!

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a virus whose job is to try and make the liver sick. It can cause cirrhosis, which scars the liver and makes it not work well, or it can cause liver cancer or even death. It can also be in the body but not do much, allowing the person infected to live a long and healthy life.

How infectious is it?

When infected moms give birth, about 5-6 babies out of 100 become infected. At this time, we don't know how many of those 5 or 6 babes will remain infected over their lifetimes, but it is fair to assume that it will be most. On the other hand, adults with acute HCV have about an eighty-five percent of going on to be chronically infected, meaning that it's liable to stay with them for a long time – probably a lifetime.

Hepatitis C is actually difficult to contract. You pretty much have to have a blood-to-blood contact. At this time, hepatitis C is considered to be even less infectious than HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.



How do people get infected?

The hepatitis C virus is found in blood and some body fluids. It's important to remember that although the virus might be in some body fluids, blood-to-blood contact is the most likely way of becoming infected. This virus can live for several days on surfaces such as razor blades, toothbrushes, needles/syringes, fingernail files and clippers and other personal grooming tools that might cause some bleeding.

Getting an infected person's blood in your nose, on your gums, or around your eyeballs where the mucous membranes are thin is a possible way to become infected. Having unprotected sex leaves you open to many infectious diseases, including hepatitis C.

How do we prevent infection?

There's no vaccine for hepatitis C, so your best method of prevention is avoiding behavior that could lead to all sorts of infections. If you're not in a long-term monogamous relationship, use a latex condom every time you have sex. Don't share anything that can penetrate the skin. If a person is bleeding and you don't have impermeable gloves, press a sanitary napkin over the wound, or use a folded piece of absorbent material like a towel and cover your hands with trash can liners or plastic sandwich baggies. Never use another person's personal care items or drug works because you might nick yourself and create an opening on your skin for their blood to enter. And, don't forget that hepatitis isn't the only virus that can hang around and cause problems.

