

## AGA Patient Education Section

# Hepatitis C

Hepatitis is inflammation, or swelling, of the liver that often can result from a virus. Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is the most common form of viral hepatitis. HCV can be either acute, meaning that it is short term (<6 mo), or chronic, meaning it is long term and can last a lifetime.

HCV can be spread through the following:

- Contaminated (dirty or used) needles.
- High-risk sexual behavior (rarely).
- Sharing personal care items that could have a carrier's blood, such as a razor (rarely).

HCV is not spread through food or water, coughing or sneezing, touching, breastfeeding, or sharing eating utensils.

## Symptoms

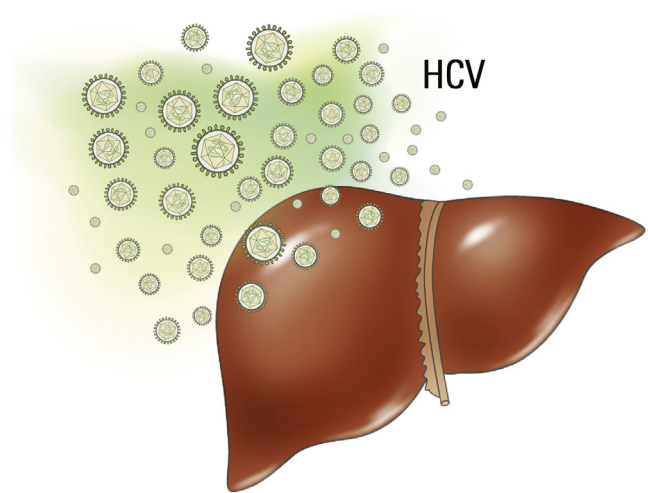
Many people with HCV have no symptoms or only have vague, flu-like symptoms.

Symptoms often start approximately 6 to 7 weeks after exposure, but this varies. Some people with HCV might have:

- Fatigue (feeling tired or weak).
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Diarrhea (loose stool).
- Belly pain.
- Muscle and joint aches.
- Changes in the color of urine and stool.
- Jaundice (when your skin and/or the whites of your eyes turn yellow).

## Getting Tested

If you have symptoms and are at risk for HCV, your doctor will take your medical history, perform a physical examination, and order blood tests. There are many factors that can help determine if you should get tested, such as a family history of



HCV, liver blood test results, signs of liver disease, human immunodeficiency virus, and if you were born between 1945 and 1965.

## Treatment

When caring for HCV, you are trying to stop further harm to the liver, such as cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and cancer. No 2 patients with HCV infection are exactly the same, so each patient will need an individualized care plan based on the type of HCV and other health issues.

In the past, medications to treat HCV only worked for some people and had major side effects. Now, there are new drugs that can help more people, with fewer side effects, although they can cost a lot. Talk to your doctor about the best options for you.

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*For more information on hepatitis C, talk to your doctor and visit [www.gastro.org/patient-care/conditions-diseases/hepatitis-c](http://www.gastro.org/patient-care/conditions-diseases/hepatitis-c).*