

# Hep C Fact Sheet

Does Hep C have a cure? Yes! Getting tested for Hep C is important to know your status. If positive you can receive lifesaving treatment that can cure most people within 8-12 weeks.

## What is Hep C?

Hep C (HCV) is an infection caused by a virus that attacks the liver which leads to inflammation. Hep C is usually spread when someone comes into contact with blood from an infected person. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. When someone is infected with Hep C they can have a very mild illness with few or no symptoms or a serious condition requiring hospitalization. Most individuals who get infected will develop a chronic or lifelong infection. If left untreated Hep C can cause serious health problems including liver disease, liver failure, liver cancer, and even death.

## Hep C Transmission

- Birth
- Sharing drug injection equipment (sharing needles/syringes)
- Sex with an infected person. Men who have sex with men (MSM) are at greater risk.
- Unregulated tattoos or body piercings
- Sharing personal items such as glucose monitors, razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes, and other items that may have come into contact with infected blood.
- Blood transfusions and organ transplants. Before widespread screening of blood supply in 1992, Hep C was also spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants.

## Symptoms

Individuals with chronic Hep C can live for years without symptoms or feeling sick. When symptoms appear with chronic Hep C they often are a sign of advanced liver disease. Getting tested is the only way to know if you have Hep C.

Many people with Hep C do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected.

If symptoms occur, they can include:

- Yellow eyes
- Yellow skin
- Loss of appetite
- Upset stomach
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Dark urine
- Light color stool
- Joint pain
- Fatigue

## Key Steps for Providers

### 1. Screen

Using a rapid or lab-based HCV antibody assay:

- All persons born between 1945-1965 (baby boomers) once in their lifetime without attaining past risk
- People who inject drugs who are currently injecting or who have ever injected
- Persons living with HIV (PLWH) at their first medical visit, plus annually for all MSM living with HIV

### 2. Confirm

With an HCV RNA test using reflex-to-RNA to streamline diagnosis and reduce loss-to-follow-up (or refer and link for confirmatory testing)

### 3. Refer and Link

- To RNA confirmatory testing for antibody-positive patients
- Or, to be assessed for treatment for RNA-confirmed patients

### 4. Counsel

- HCV-positive persons on adherence for those receiving treatment, transmission prevention, and liver health
- HCV-negative persons on harm reduction information

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## How can Hep C be prevented?

- Avoid sharing or reusing needles, syringes or any other equipment used to prepare and inject drugs, steroids, hormones, or other substances.
- Don't use personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person's blood (glucose monitors, razors, nail clippers or even toothbrushes.)
- If you plan on getting a tattoo or body piercing, ensure that they are licensed.

## Treatment

Providers are welcome to reach our GTZ program for consultation regarding treatment options as-needed. For additional assistance, you can contact the Sexual Health and Harm Reduction Program at the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department at 408-792-3720 or email [GettingtoZeroSCC@phd.sccgov.org](mailto:GettingtoZeroSCC@phd.sccgov.org).

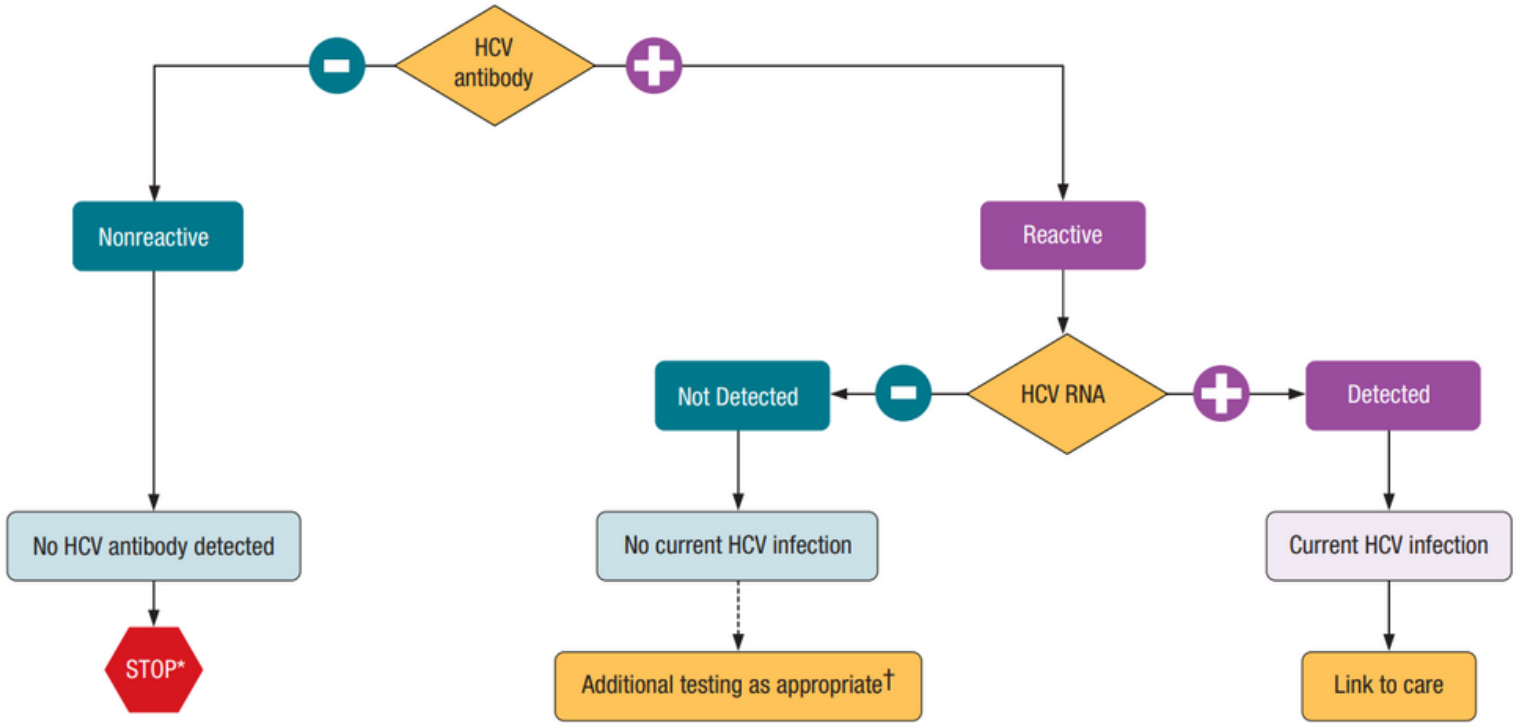
## Tests used to diagnose someone with Hep C

- A blood test called an HCV antibody test (anti-HCV) helps determine if someone has ever been infected with the Hep C virus. This test looks for antibodies which are proteins that are released into the bloodstream when someone gets infected with the virus. Individuals who test positive for the HCV antibody test are given a follow up HCV RNA test to learn whether they have an active infection (this can also be called a PCR test.)
- If infected, you will always have antibodies in your blood. Even if you have cleared the virus and have been cured, you will still have antibodies in your blood.
- A reactive or positive antibody test does not necessarily mean that you have active HCV. A follow up RNA test is needed.

## Who should get tested?

- 18 years of age and older
- All pregnant women (get tested during each pregnancy)
- If you have ever injected drugs even if it was just once or many years ago.
- If you currently inject drugs (get tested regularly)
- Have HIV
- Have abnormal liver test or liver disease
- On hemodialysis or had it in the past
- Received donated blood or organs before July 1992
- Received clotting factor concentrates before 1987
- Exposure to blood from a person who has Hep C
- Born to a mother with Hep C
- Any individual who requests a Hep C test should receive it regardless of disclosure risk. Individuals may be reluctant to disclose stigmatizing risks.

# Screening Algorithm



Screening Algorithm:  
<https://www.hepatitisc.uw.edu/go/screening-diagnosis/diagnostic-testing/core-concept/all>