

How is Hepatitis C spread among people who inject drugs?

The Hepatitis C virus is very infectious and can easily spread when a person comes into contact with surfaces, equipment, or objects contaminated with infected blood, even in amounts too small to see. The virus can survive on dry surfaces and equipment for up to 2 weeks.

The most common ways for people who inject drugs to get Hepatitis C are from:

- **Needles & Syringes.** Sharing or reusing needles/syringes increases the chance of spreading the Hepatitis C virus.
- **Preparation Equipment.** The most common equipment are cottons and cookers, but water, ties, and alcohol swabs can also become contaminated during the drug preparation process.
- **Fingers.** Fingers that come into contact with infected blood can contaminate the injection site, cookers, ties, and swabs.

Symptoms of Hepatitis C

Symptoms of Hepatitis C can include:

- Fever
- Dark urine
- Feeling tired
- Grey-colored stool
- Not wanting to eat
- Joint pain
- Upset stomach
- Yellow skin and eyes
- Throwing up

However, many people who get Hepatitis C do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected.

Getting Tested

Get tested if you have ever injected drugs, even once.

If you are interested in getting tested, please contact NCHRC.

Contact Us

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Hepatitis C & Injection Drug Use



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What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a serious liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus. Some people get only a short term infection and are able to clear the infection without treatment. However, about 80% of people with HCV develop a chronic (lifelong) infection. Over time, HCV can cause serious health problems including liver damage, liver failure, and even liver cancer.

Did you know?

All equipment used to prepare and inject drugs can spread Hepatitis C when contaminated and shared.

Safer Injecting Strategies to Reduce the Risk of Hepatitis C

Use Sterile Injection Equipment. Avoid Reusing or Sharing.

Your blood may end up on any item you touch or use when injecting, including syringes, cookers, cottons, waters, and ties. Use new, sterile equipment each time you inject.

Have a New Spare Sterile Syringe to Split Drugs.

Use an extra sterile syringe to split drugs, using your own cooker and cotton. Avoid drawing up from a cooker if someone else has used it. There may still be blood on it.

If You Must Reuse Equipment, Then Mark Yours.

Avoid sharing any injection equipment. **The virus is alive in blood outside the body.** If you must reuse, keep a set of works with markings on it so you know it's yours.

If You Must Share a Syringe, Then Bleach It.

If you must share a syringe, then clean it with bleach and sterile water.

- Step 1:** Fill the syringe with sterile water and tap/shake for 30 seconds.
- Step 2:** Fill the syringe with bleach and tap/shake for 30 seconds.
- Step 3:** Fill syringe with (new) sterile water and tap/shake for 30 seconds.