

## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The virus infects the blood and can lead to major liver damage and even death. Hepatitis C is different from hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

## How do I know if I have hepatitis C?

The only way to know for sure is to get tested.

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## Protect yourself from hepatitis C

There is no vaccine for hepatitis C. Preventing infection is the only way to protect yourself. Here's how to do it:

- Never share needles, syringes, water, cotton, tourniquets or cookers for shooting drugs.
  - Use sterile needles and syringes from the store or a needle exchange program every time. Call 503-280-1611 for information on where to exchange used needles for new ones at no cost.
  - If you snort drugs, don't share straws.
  - Use condoms to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). If you have an
- STD, you can get hepatitis C more easily.
  - Don't share personal items like toothbrushes or razors. There may be blood on them.
  - If you get tattooed or pierced, make sure the artist uses sterile equipment and uses clean latex gloves each time.
  - If you're thinking about stopping using drugs and/or alcohol, call 1-800-923-4357 (1-800-HELP) for information on treatment programs.

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## How is hepatitis C spread?

The hepatitis C virus is spread by blood to blood contact with a person who has it. Sharing needles and/or works for shooting drugs easily spreads hepatitis C. Other activities that can expose you to another person's blood-like sharing straws for snorting drugs or having unprotected sex with someone who is infected—can expose you to hepatitis C also. There is no vaccine against hepatitis C.

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## Important Numbers

**For info on hepatitis C:**

**503-988-3406**  
**1-888-443-7232**

(Hepatitis hotline)

**For info on signing up for the Oregon Health Plan:**

**503-988-3816**  
**1-800-723-3638 (SAFENET)**

**For info on low-cost hepatitis A and B vaccines:**

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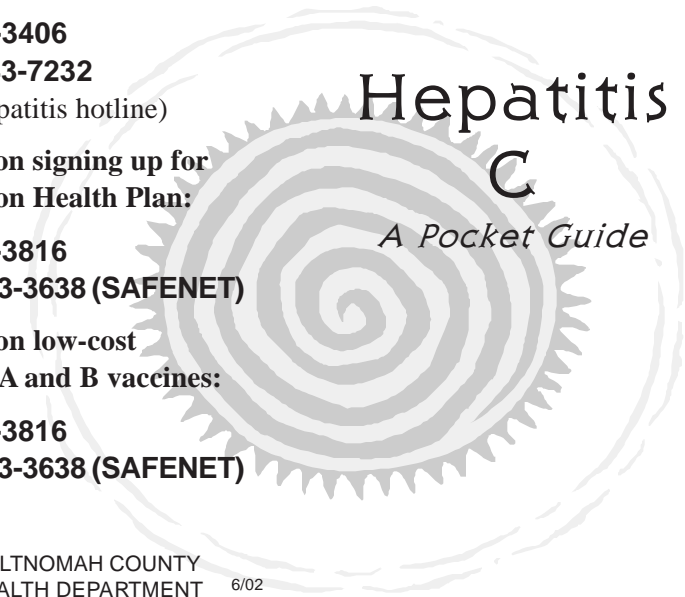
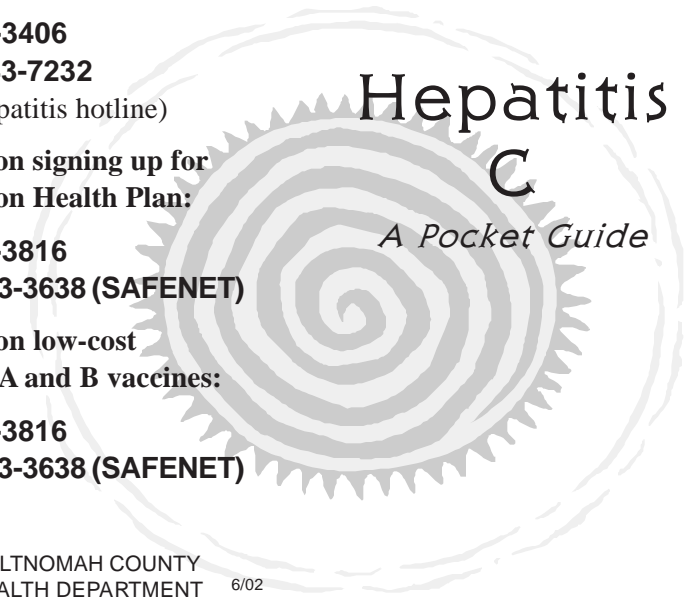
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## Who should be tested for hep C?

Anyone who has . . .

- ever injected drugs, even if it was once or twice many years ago
- had a blood transfusion before 1992
- been treated for blood clotting problems before 1987

## Where to get tested

Contact your doctor or your health clinic for information on where you can get tested for hepatitis C.

## What to do if you have hepatitis C

- **Don't drink alcohol.** Remember, hepatitis C is a disease that affects your liver. Alcohol is very hard on your liver.
- See a doctor for a complete exam and a plan to keep you healthy.

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- See a doctor for a complete exam and a plan to keep you healthy.

- If you can't afford a doctor and don't have health insurance, find out if you can get Oregon Health Plan benefits. Call 503-988-3816 or 1-800-723-3638 (1-800-SAFENET) for information.
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B.
- Talk to your doctor before using any medicine, especially acetaminophen and ibuprofen. Read medication labels.
- Talk about the risk with your injecting and sex partners.
- Don't share needles or works for shooting drugs.
- Don't share personal items like toothbrushes and razors. They may have blood on them.
- Don't donate blood, organs or semen.

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## What happens to people with hepatitis C?

For every 100 people infected with hepatitis C:

- 85 are infected for life and can infect other people
- 70 will develop chronic liver disease
- 15 will get hardening of the liver (cirrhosis) over a period of 20 to 30 years
- 5 may die from long-term infection.

The most common symptoms of hepatitis C are fatigue, mild fever, muscle or joint aches, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, mild stomach pain and sometimes diarrhea.

Some people notice dark urine and light colored stools, followed by a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes. Some people infected with hepatitis lose their taste for cigarettes.

Sometimes people have no symptoms at all.

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