



ACCÉSSS

Alliance des Communautés Culturelles pour
l'Égalité dans la Santé et les Services Sociaux

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What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is one of three types of infections of the liver (the others are A and B). It's the only type for which there is no vaccine at the present time. In Quebec, persons with this disease are obliged to declare it. The Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is even capable of surviving about 5 to 7 weeks outside the body.

Prevalence of Hepatitis C:

Globally, about 71 million individuals are chronic carriers of Hepatitis C; and most of them do not know it. The disease progresses slowly and, by the time the symptoms manifest themselves, the liver could have already been seriously damaged.

Certain countries have large numbers of carriers of HCV (the Hepatitis C Virus); among them:

- ✓ **Algeria**
- ✓ **Bangladesh**
- ✓ **China**
- ✓ **Egypt**
- ✓ **Greece**
- ✓ **Italy**
- ✓ **Pakistan**
- ✓ **Somalia**
- ✓ **Vietnam**
- ✓ **The Philippines**

These countries have either a high rate of prevalence of Hepatitis C, or large sectors of their population living with Hepatitis C. Therefore, if you originate in regions with higher rates of contamination, it would be in your best interest to ask for a screening test so you can avoid catching the disease and unknowingly transmitting it to others.

In Canada, about 250,000 persons have Hepatitis C; and many of them don't know they are infected.

What if I don't have a family doctor?

You can call **514-934-0505, extension 7406** to get a free and confidential test for Hepatitis C.

How is the Hepatitis C virus transmitted?

- ✓ By medical or dental interventions carried out with instruments not properly sterilized, especially in those previously-identified countries;
- ✓ By the blood of a contaminated person;
- ✓ By the sharing of hypodermic needles or other objects that pierce the skin;
- ✓ Occasionally, transmitted by a mother to her baby during her delivery.

There are two phases:

- An acute phase from the moment of contamination up to 6 months. During this phase, even if the person does not display any symptoms, he or she can transmit the virus.
- A chronic phase beyond 6 months that can develop complications such as cirrhosis or liver cancer.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms related to Hepatitis C are the following: Loss of appetite, muscle and joint pains, weight loss, fatigue, insomnia (lack of sleep) or hypersomnia (too much sleep), nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches, depression, rapidly-changing and sporadic mood swings, flu-like symptoms, jaundice.

How to know if one is a carrier?

To know if you are a carrier of HCV, you must ask a doctor for a test and then go to your CLSC (local community services centre). A laboratory examination of a sample of your blood is the only way to know for certain if you are a carrier of Hepatitis C. Two tests are needed to determine if you have Hepatitis C:

- The first test will show if you have been in contact with the Hepatitis C Virus in the past. This first test cannot confirm if you have Hepatitis C now.
- A second test is necessary to determine if the virus is active in your body.

Talk to your doctor: Screening is possible; and there is a treatment that can cure you!

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Why should I be tested for Hepatitis C?

Sometimes Hepatitis C does not display any symptoms, even for many years. It's important to be tested because once the symptoms appear, the liver is already sick.

You should be tested after being exposed to the blood of a person who may be contaminated. In other words, we recommend you to be tested if:

- ✓ ...you have received blood-clotting factors before 1987.
- ✓ ...you have received blood, blood plasma products or an organ transplant before 1992.
- ✓ ...you have received blood, blood plasma products or an organ transplant from a donor infected with HCV.
- ✓ ...you have accidentally come into contact with blood or materials that could be contaminated. For example, being stung by a dirty needle while picking it up.
- ✓ ...you have shared injected substances at least once, even if it happened a long time ago. For example: hypodermic, spoon, water, alcohol swab...
- ✓ ...you have shared materials used to snort drugs such as a straw or a rolled-up banknote.
- ✓ ...you had a tattoo or a piercing done under inadequately-sterilized conditions.

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ATTENTION: Screening for Hepatitis C is not part of the medical exam that you had undergone before your arrival in Canada!

Talk to your doctor as soon as possible!

Is there an effective treatment against Hepatitis C?

Yes. There is a treatment for the Hepatitis C Virus requiring a medical prescription. In Quebec, a general practitioner will be able to recommend a suitable treatment, or will refer you to a specialist, depending on the situation. The duration of the treatment today is about 12 weeks, and is much more effective than in the past. Most treatments are covered by the RAMQ, if you are eligible.

Please note that there is no vaccine or immunity after being cured of Hepatitis C. The treatment cures most persons infected with Hepatitis C, but one can be infected once again.

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Percentage of persons with the Hepatitis C Virus by country

