



Western
Health

Hepatitis C

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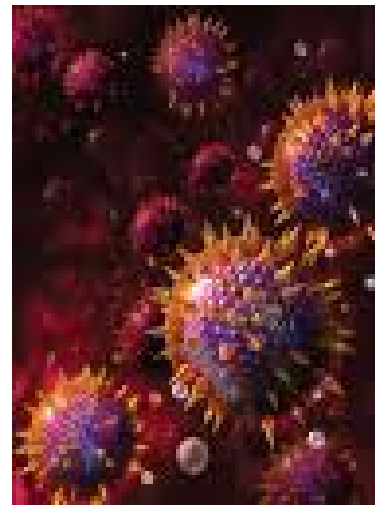
Objectives:

You will learn:

- More about Hepatitis C.
- The importance of the liver.
- Risk factors and prevention.
- Signs and symptoms.

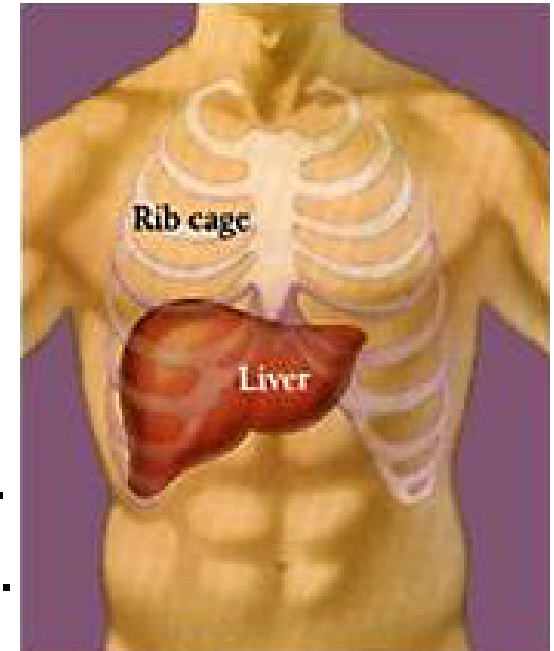
Hepatitis C Virus:

- Is a virus that is carried in the blood.
- HCV is transmitted when the blood of an infected person comes in contact with another person's blood.
- The virus attaches to healthy cells and forces them to replicate the virus.
- Hepatitis C attacks the liver and can do serious damage.
- The liver is essential for life.



The Liver

- Is located in the upper right quadrant of the abdomen.
- Cleans the blood.
- Regulates hormones.
- Helps with blood clotting.
- Produces bile.
- Produces important proteins.
- Maintains blood sugar levels.




Hepatitis C:



- The virus is quite resilient and can survive outside the body for 4 or more days.
- When first infected, most don't show any symptoms. It affects each person differently.
- 75-85% of those infected will progress to the chronic carrier state.

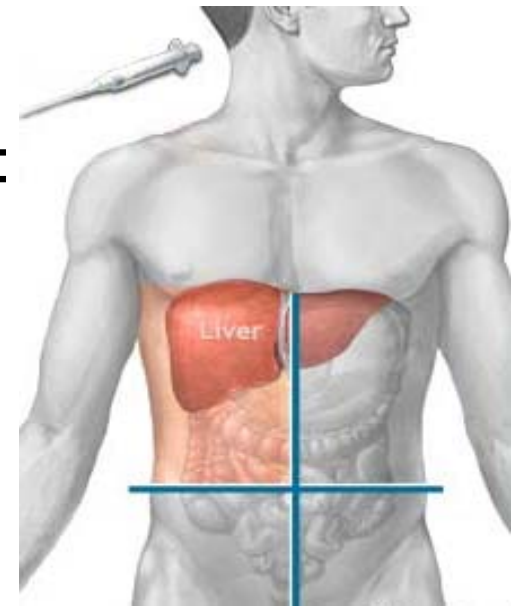
There is no vaccination or cure for Hepatitis C.

Facts:

- Approximately 250,000 Canadians are infected and about 20% of them don't know it. 
- Between 3200 and 5000 Canadians are infected each year.
- **Incubation Period:**
 - Average: 6-7 weeks (can range between 2-26 weeks).
 - An infected person can transmit HCV to someone else during the incubation period.

Common Risks for HCV:

- Sharing your injection material with others: syringes, filters , spoon, cotton, etc.
- Sharing your materials for sniffing/snorting : tubes, straws, pen, paper or for smoking-crack pipes.
- Body piercing: sharing needles, pins, studs.
- Tattooing equipment (including ink): contaminated needles.
- Sharing objects that could have been in contact with blood: toothbrush, nail clippers, razors, etc.
- Fighting when blood is involved.



HCV High Risk Behaviors:



- Sharing drug-use equipment.
- Blood transfusions before 1992.
- Blood or cutting rituals.
- Unsterilized medical equipment.
- Sharing tattoo or body piercing equipment.
- Unprotected anal intercourse if you are Hepatitis C positive.





Other Modes of Transmission:

- A baby born to a mother with Hepatitis C (6%).
- Breast feeding (no study reports link HCV).
- Contact with tampons or sanitary napkins which contain blood.
- Unprotected sex when blood is present - including menstrual blood.

You cannot get HCV by:

- Casual contact: touching, kissing, hugging, shaking hands, ect.
- Coughing or sneezing.
- Sharing bathrooms.
- Sharing kitchen, eating, or cooking items.
- Fly bites.
- Rodents and animals.
- Sharing cigarettes.
- Using new or sterile medical equipment.

Signs of HCV

- As the disease progresses some develop flu like symptoms: tiredness, fever, body aches, dry itchy skin, poor appetite, nausea, vomiting.
- HCV can progress slowly, or become serious in as little as 5 years.
- Some people have no symptoms and feel healthy for years.
- Some may eventually need a liver transplant.

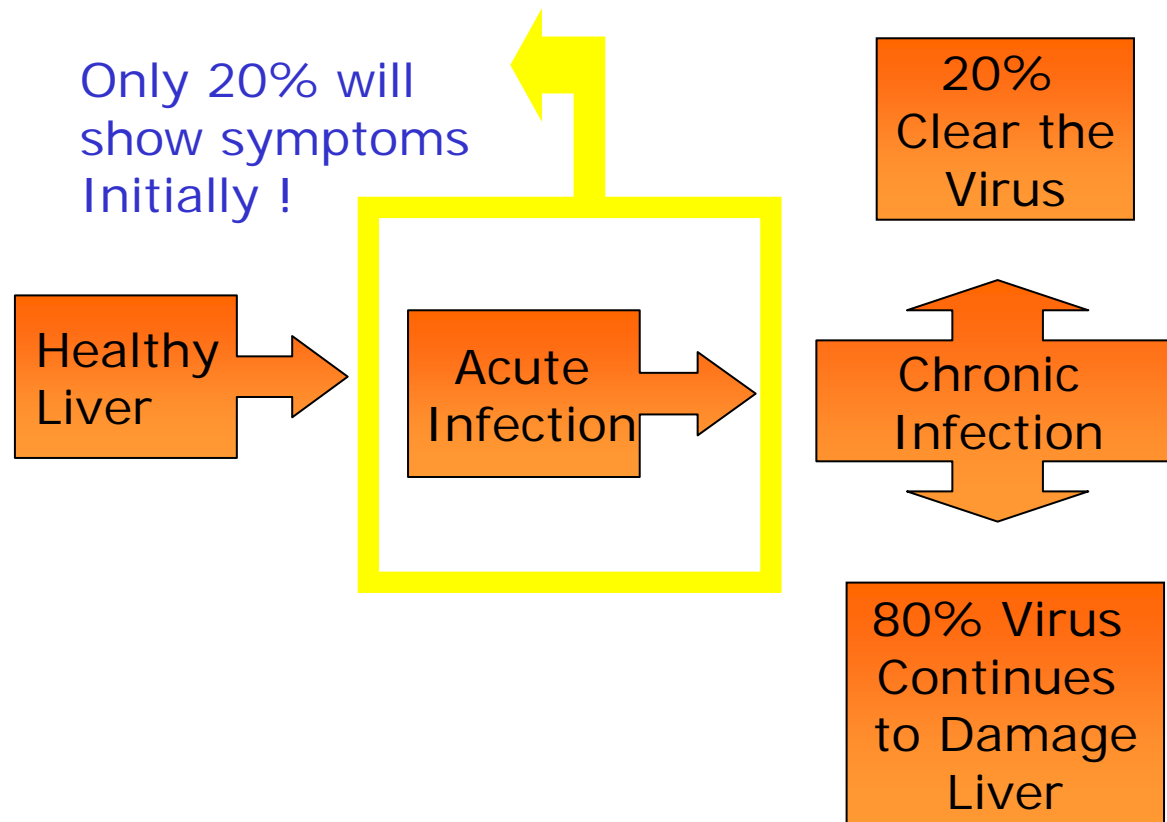


Can anyone get HCV?

- Yes, it can happen to you.
- Hepatitis C does not discriminate against age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or where you live.



Stages of HCV:



Diagnosing HCV:

- A simple blood test is required to screen for HCV.



Why get tested?

- There is no vaccination for Hepatitis C.
- To know if you are infected.
- To prevent from infecting others.
- To start treatment.

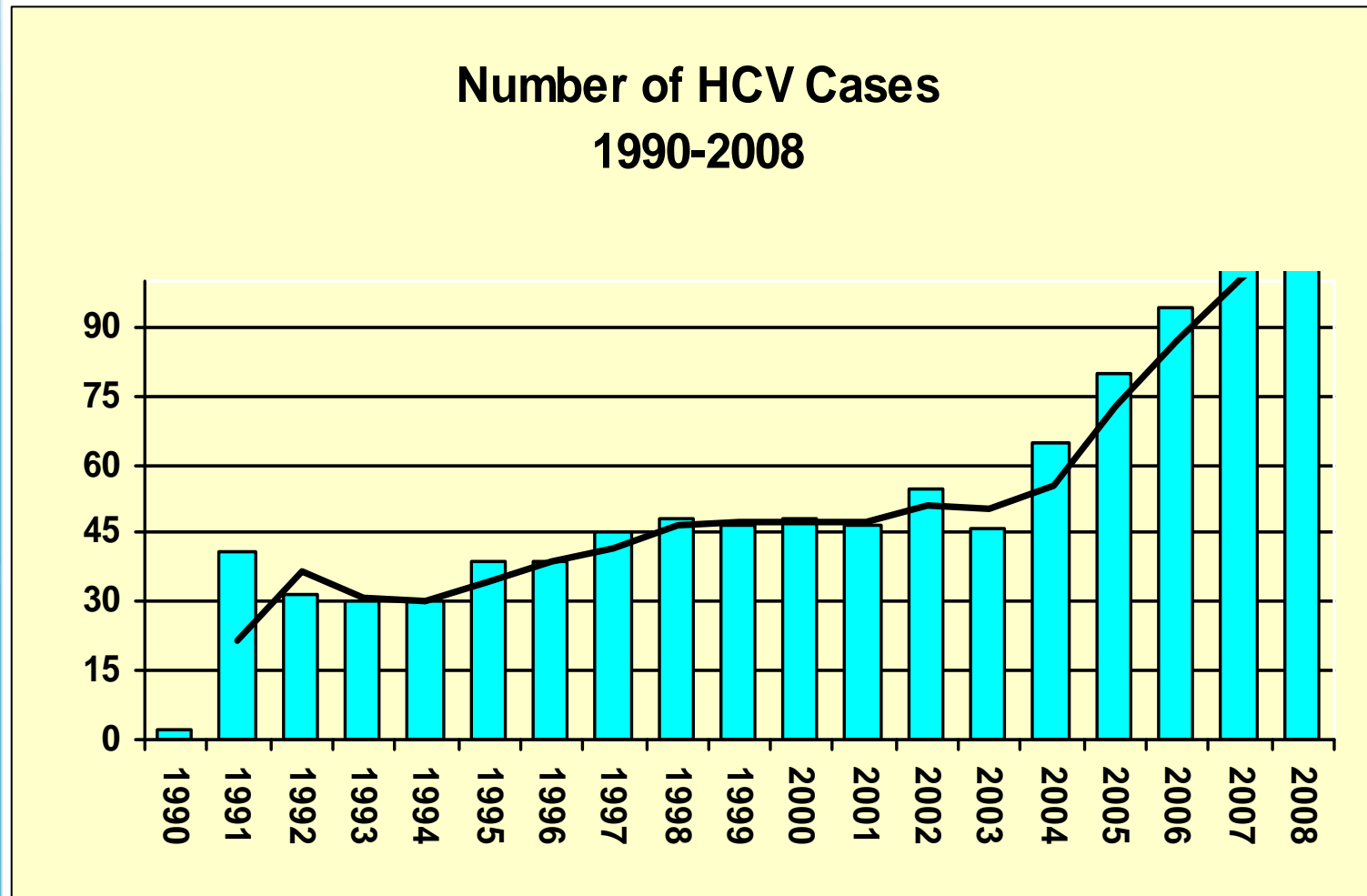
Test results:



- A **positive** test result:
 - means you are infected with HCV.

- A **negative** test result:
 - Means you could still be infected with the virus.
 - If you were exposed to the HCV in the last 70 days, it may not show up in your blood test.
 - If you put yourself at risk, you should be tested every 3-6 months.

Number of Newly Diagnosed Hepatitis C Cases in NL, 1990-2008 [5].



If you have HCV:

- Ask about treatment and counseling.
- Regular exercise and proper nutrition.
- Get vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B.
- Protect yourself from re-infection.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.



How to protect yourself:

- Don't do injection drugs.
- If you do, don't share needles.
- Limit your number of sex partners.
- Always practice safer sex.
- Always make sure new and sterilized equipment is used for tattooing and piercing.
- Wear gloves if you are likely to come into contact with someone else's blood.





Preventing Transmission: (Hepatitis C Patients)

- Do not donate blood, semen, organs and tissue.
- Do not share needles, dispose of them safely.
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, dental floss.
- Cover open cuts or wounds.
- Practice safe sex (test partners).
- Clean blood spills with bleach.
- Counsel women of childbearing age of risk of maternal-child transmission.

Cleaning Needles:

- Bleach does **NOT** kill HCV



Summary:

- Hepatitis C rates are rising.
- Know how to protect yourself from HCV.
- There is treatment available (15-30% will recover spontaneously).
- There is no cure.
- There is no vaccination.



Prevention is the key.