WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?
Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV is far more infectious than HIV. Presently, there is no vaccine to prevent HCV infection.

WHY DO I NEED MY LIVER?
It’s important to keep your liver healthy because it plays a key role in your overall health. It helps digest food and stores vitamins and minerals. Most importantly, the liver is a key organ in your body working.

HOW IS THE HEPATITIS C VIRUS SPREAD?
HCV is spread through contact with infected blood. While many people become infected through blood and blood products, the risk of the virus appearing in the bloodstream is negligible due to rigorous standards ensuring the safety of the blood supply. The majority of HCV transmission in Canada today is due to injection drug use and sharing of infected drug paraphernalia.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS C?
You may have HCV and not have any signs or symptoms. An estimated 75 to 85 percent of people infected with HCV don’t even know they are infected.

WHAT IF I HAVE HEPATITIS C?
Hepatitis C can be diagnosed through a blood test. If you think you are at risk, or may be infected with HCV, talk to your healthcare provider about testing for hepatitis C.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT IF I HAVE HEPATITIS C?
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HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS AGAINST HCV?
The best way to keep yourself safe from HCV infection is to take the following precautions:

REMEMBER:
Some adults with HCV clear the virus on their own within 6 months. If you clear the virus, you will no longer be infectious and will not be able to transmit the virus to others. It is important to find out if you have the virus so that you can take the necessary steps to protect yourself and others.

WHAT IF I HAVE HEPATITIS C?
Some adults with HCV will clear the virus on their own within 6 months. If you clear the virus, you will no longer be infectious and will not be able to transmit the virus to others. People who have cleared the virus can be reassured that they are no longer infectious, meaning they can’t spread the virus to others. Management and care of acute hepatitis C is focused on relief of symptoms, preventing complications and further transmission. If you have chronic hepatitis C your health care provider will monitor you closely with blood tests to keep an eye on your liver health, and may recommend treatment. Not all people with chronic HCV infection will need to be treated. A combination of medications can be used to treat hepatitis C. Talk to your health care provider to see if treatment is right for you.

To prevent further damage to your liver, your health care provider may advise vaccination against hepatitis A and B. Many provinces and territories provide these vaccinations at no direct cost to you. Your health care provider may also recommend that you avoid alcohol consumption to decrease your risk of liver damage.

If you have hepatitis C, you may infect others. You can prevent spreading the virus by following the same safety rules, drug behavior and personal hygiene precautions outlined earlier to reduce your risk of infection. Additionally:

• Don’t share needles, syringes, or other drug paraphernalia
• Don’t use the same sexual partners
• Do use a condom every time you have sex
• Use rubber or latex condoms

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HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS AGAINST HCV?
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• Avoid any form of injection drug use.
• Avoid tattooing, body piercing or acupuncture if needles or sharp equipment are used.
• Avoid sharing personal items like razors, scissors, nail clippers or toothbrushes.
• Practice safe sex. Use condoms to prevent acquiring sexually transmitted bloodborne infections (STIBs) including HIV.
• The risk of transmission of HCV is low but not absent, particularly for those with more than one sexual partner. If you have a concurrent sexually transmitted infection with open sores present do not engage in sexual activity.
• Be especially careful when traveling abroad in countries where HCV is widespread.

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HEPATITIS C GETS THE FACTS
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