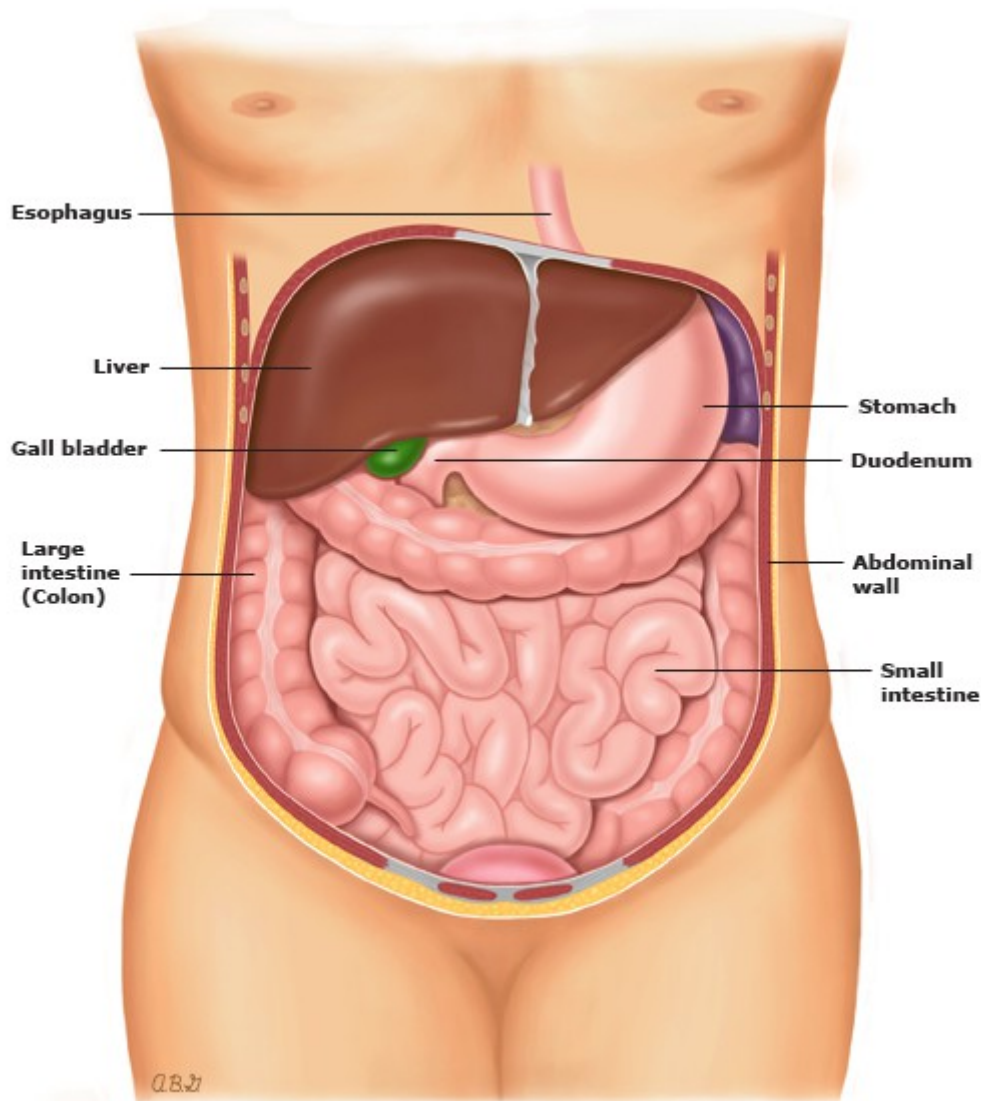


Hepatitis C

What is hepatitis C? — Hepatitis C is a disease that harms the liver. The liver is a big organ in the upper right side of the belly.



A virus causes this disease. The virus is called the hepatitis C virus. It spreads from person to person through contact with blood. This can happen in a few ways, like sharing drug needles or having sex.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C? — Most people with hepatitis C have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they can include:

- Feeling tired or weak
- Lack of hunger
- Nausea
- Muscle or joint aches

- Weight loss

In most cases, hepatitis C lasts for many years. That can lead to liver scarring, called “cirrhosis.” Many people with cirrhosis have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they can include:

- Swelling in the belly and legs, and fluid build-up in the lungs
- Bruising or bleeding easily
- Trouble taking in a full breath
- Feeling full in the belly
- Yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes, called jaundice
- Confusion that can come on suddenly
- Coma

How did I get the disease? — You can catch the hepatitis C virus if you have contact with the blood of someone who is infected. This can happen if you:

- Share drug needles or cocaine straws
- Have sex with someone who is infected
- Use infected needles for tattooing, acupuncture, or piercings
- Share toothbrushes, razors, or other things that could have blood on them
- Got a blood transfusion before 1990 (when the way blood was handled changed)

A pregnant woman who is infected can also give hepatitis C to her baby.

Is there a test for hepatitis C? — Yes. Your doctor might order a few tests:

- Blood tests can show:
 - If you have hepatitis C
 - What type of the virus you have (there are 6 types)
 - Which treatment will work best for you

If you have hepatitis C, your doctor will also want to know if you have any liver scarring. Ways to check for scarring include:

- Blood tests
- Liver scan – This is a type of imaging test that can show how much scarring you have. Not all doctors have access to the machine that does the scan.
- Biopsy – For this test, a doctor puts a needle into your liver and takes out a small sample of tissue. The sample will show how bad the damage is.

How is hepatitis C treated? — It depends on what type of hepatitis C you have. There are different medicines to treat hepatitis C. Some of them only work on certain forms of the

hepatitis C virus. You will have to take a combination of 2 or more medicines based on which virus you have. The medicines might come in pill form or in shots that you give yourself. Treatment usually lasts 3 months to a year.

Some people should not take the medicines used to treat hepatitis C, including:

- Pregnant women
- Women who are trying to get pregnant or who are not using a reliable form of birth control
- Men who are trying to get someone pregnant or who are not using a reliable form of birth control

Your doctor can help you decide if these medicines are right for you.

Is there anything I can do to protect my liver? — Yes, you can:

- Avoid alcohol.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.
- Get vaccinated for pneumonia, the flu, and other diseases.
- Ask your doctor before taking any over-the-counter pain medicines (these medicines can sometimes damage the liver).
- Avoid marijuana.

What if I want to get pregnant? — If you want to get pregnant, talk to your doctor first. About 1 in 20 women who have hepatitis C pass the virus on to the baby during pregnancy. That number goes up in women who are also infected with HIV.

What will my life be like? — Many people with hepatitis C are able to live normal lives. Treatment can cure the disease in many cases.

If you have hepatitis C, it is still safe to:

- Hug, kiss, and touch other people (but you can spread the infection through sex)
- Share forks, spoons, cups, and food
- Sneeze or cough
- Breastfeed

Vaccines when you have hepatitis C

Which vaccines do people with hepatitis C need? — People with hepatitis C need some of the same vaccines that all people need, plus some extra ones, too. People with

hepatitis C need vaccines against:

- **Hepatitis A** – People with hepatitis C should get 2 doses of this vaccine at some point during their adult life. But the vaccine is not needed if blood tests show that a person is already protected against hepatitis A.
- **Hepatitis B** – People with hepatitis C should get 3 doses of this vaccine at some point during their adult life. But the vaccine is not needed if blood tests show that a person is already protected against hepatitis B.
- **Pneumonia** (this is called the pneumococcal vaccine) – People with hepatitis C should get 1 to 2 doses of this vaccine between ages of 19 and 64. They should also get another dose after turning 65 if it's been more than 5 years since their last dose.
- **The flu** (this is called the influenza vaccine, or the “flu shot”) – People with hepatitis C should get 1 dose of this vaccine every year.
- **Diphtheria and tetanus** – Vaccines against these 2 diseases are usually together in 1 shot. People with hepatitis C should get 1 dose of these vaccines every 10 years.
- **Pertussis** (also called “whooping cough”) – People with hepatitis C should get 1 dose of this vaccine at some point during their adult life. Sometimes the vaccine for pertussis comes in the same shot as the diphtheria and tetanus vaccines.

Why are vaccines so important when you have hepatitis C? — Infections can be hard on anyone who already has another infection or is sick in other ways. People with hepatitis C have an infection caused by a virus. This is called “viral hepatitis.”

When you have hepatitis C, getting infected with a second type of viral hepatitis can be very serious. That's because your liver is already not working as well as it should. Another viral hepatitis infection can shut down your liver completely.

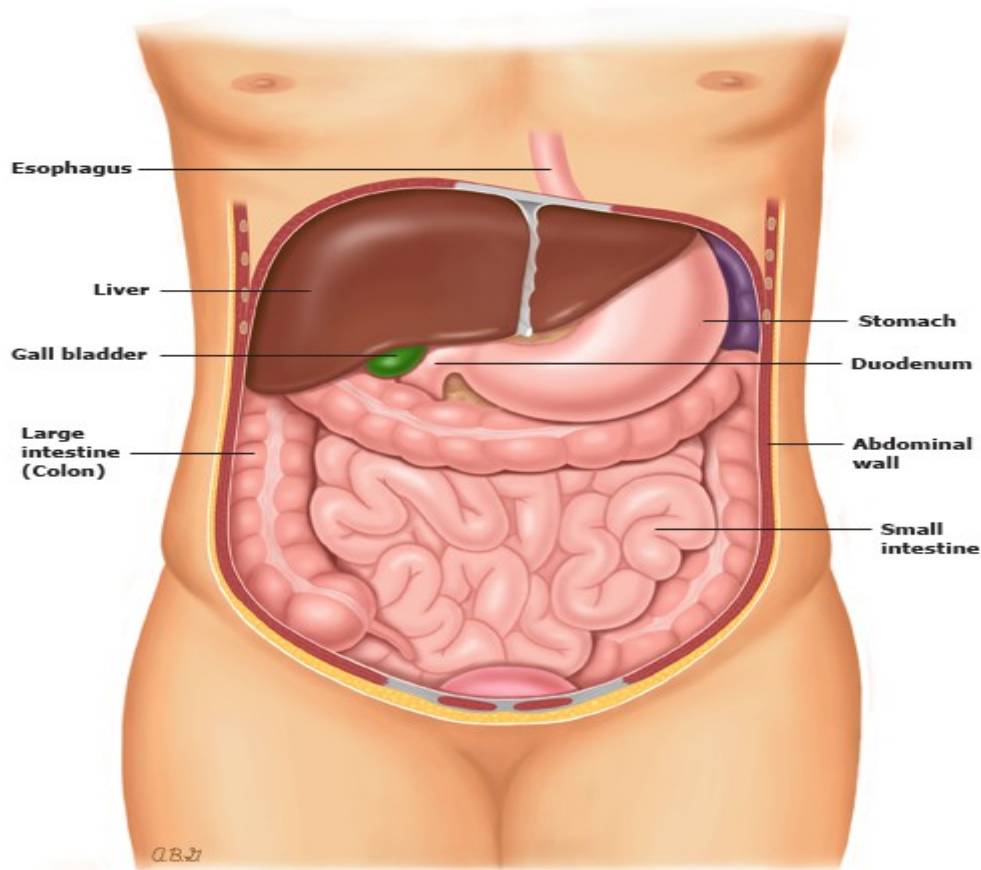
Having a second infection, even if it's not another form of hepatitis, can also be serious when you have hepatitis C. That's because your body and your immune system (which fights infection) are weak. Plus, your liver might not be working right because of your hepatitis, so your body is already having a hard time staying healthy.

Vaccines can cause side effects, such as soreness where you get the shot. But the benefits of the vaccines are far greater than the downsides.

How do I find out if I have had all the vaccines I need? — Ask your main doctor if you have been tested for viral hepatitis. People can have more than one form of viral hepatitis. Then ask if you have had all the vaccines you need.

HEPATITIS B

What is hepatitis B? — Hepatitis B is a serious disease that harms the liver. The liver is a big organ in the upper right side of the belly.



A virus causes this disease. The virus spreads from person to person when their bodily fluids touch. This can happen in a few ways, like having sex or sharing needles.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B? — When people first get hepatitis B, they can feel like they have the flu. Some people's eyes or skin turn yellow (called jaundice). These symptoms usually get better, but it can take weeks to months.

About 1 out of every 20 adults who gets hepatitis B ends up having the disease for a long time. This is called "chronic" hepatitis B. Most people with chronic hepatitis B have no symptoms. But, over time, the infection can lead to a liver condition called cirrhosis.

Symptoms of cirrhosis include:

- Swelling in the belly and legs, and fluid build-up in the lungs
- Bruising or bleeding easily
- Trouble breathing
- Feeling full

- Confusion that can come on suddenly
- Coma

Chronic hepatitis B also increases the risk of getting liver cancer.

How did I get the disease? — There are a few ways to catch the hepatitis B virus. All of them involve mixing bodily fluids with other people. You might have caught the disease by:

- Having sex with someone who was infected
- Sharing drug needles with someone who was infected
- Using infected needles for tattooing, acupuncture, or piercings
- Sharing toothbrushes, razors, or other personal items with someone who was infected

If your mother had hepatitis when she was pregnant with you, it's also possible you got the infection from her. This is especially likely if she is from a country where hepatitis B is common. In the same way, if you have hepatitis B and are pregnant, you can pass the infection on to your baby.

Is there a test for hepatitis B? — Yes. If your doctor suspects you have hepatitis B, he or she will do a routine exam to check for other problems. But he or she will probably also order a blood test to check for the virus.

Your doctor might also want to remove a small sample of your liver to see if it is damaged. This is called a “biopsy.”

How is hepatitis B treated? — For people who have chronic hepatitis B, treatments include:

- Medicines that fight the virus. There are several types. Your doctor will choose the right one for you, based on your symptoms.
- A liver transplant. In severe cases, people with hepatitis B need a new liver.
- Having an ultrasound test every 6 months to make sure they are not developing liver cancer. An ultrasound creates pictures of the inside of the body.

Is there anything I can do to protect my liver? — Yes. You can:

- Avoid alcohol
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and other diseases, including the flu and pneumonia
- Ask your doctor before taking any over-the-counter pain medicines. (These medicines can sometimes damage the liver.)

How can I avoid giving the disease to other people? — You can reduce your chances of spreading hepatitis B by:

- Using a latex condom during sex
- Telling sex partners that you have the disease
- Not sharing razors, toothbrushes, or anything that might have blood on it
- Not sharing needles or syringes
- Using bandages to cover cuts and open sores
- Making sure your family and close friends get tested and get the vaccine for hepatitis B
- Cleaning drops of your blood off of things with a mixture of bleach and water. For the mixture, use 9 times more water than bleach.

What if I want to get pregnant? — If you want to get pregnant, talk to your doctor first. If you are infected when you give birth, your baby should get a special shot right away. This shot helps protect your baby from infection. You might also need treatment with a medicine for several weeks before giving birth. Plus, your baby will get a vaccine shot at 1 or 2 months old, and another one at 6 months. A test between 9 and 18 months will show if the baby has the disease. Your doctor will decide if he or she needs more vaccine shots at that time.

What will my life be like? — Many people with hepatitis B are able to live normal lives. It is still safe to:

- Hug and kiss
- Share forks, spoons, and cups
- Sneeze and cough around other people
- Breastfeed