

Hepatitis C & Cancer

Hepatitis C is a virus linked to liver cancer. The good news is there are steps you can take to treat the virus and reduce your liver cancer risk.

The cancer connection

Hepatitis C can cause liver cancer. In fact, approximately 50 percent of all liver cancer cases in the U.S. are related to the hepatitis C virus.¹ Most people who do contract the virus do not know they have it and do not receive available curative treatment that can help prevent liver cancer.

The virus

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus that can lead to chronic liver infection. The most common way hepatitis C is transmitted is by sharing needles or other drug-injection equipment. African-Americans,² Hispanics³ and baby boomers (those born between 1945 and 1965) are at higher risk for hepatitis C infection.⁴

Hepatitis C becomes a chronic infection for 75 to 85 percent of infected people, but it can also be a short-term illness for some. Chronic hepatitis C can cause lifelong health problems. Most people with short-term hepatitis C do not experience symptoms, or have mild symptoms including fever, fatigue, dark urine and abdominal pain. Most people with chronic hepatitis C do not have symptoms, but many have chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis (liver scarring) or liver cancer.⁵

Cancer prevention

While no vaccine exists to prevent hepatitis C, you can reduce your chance of infection by avoiding activities that spread the virus, especially using injectable drugs. There are blood tests to screen for hepatitis C. Talk to your health care professional about getting screened if you are at risk. If you have hepatitis C, there are multiple treatment options available that can cure the virus and reduce your chance of getting liver cancer.

If your health insurance does not cover the cost of the hepatitis C treatment, there are assistance programs available. Some hepatitis C treatment manufacturers offer patient assistance programs to cover treatment costs for adults 18 years or older.

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Did you know?

- Approximately 2.7 to 3.9 million people in the U.S. have chronic hepatitis C virus infection.⁵
- Approximately 71 million people worldwide have chronic hepatitis C virus infection.⁶
- Each year in the U.S., about 22,000 men and 9,000 women are diagnosed with liver cancer, and about 16,000 men and 8,000 women die from the disease.⁷
- Liver cancer is the fastest-rising cause of cancer death in the U.S. and the second-leading cause of cancer death worldwide.⁸
- 73 percent of adults are unaware hepatitis C treatment can reduce the risk of liver cancer.⁹
- Only nine percent of adults say their physicians have ever discussed prevention strategies for hepatitis C.⁸
- Health care providers report only 59 percent of patients diagnosed with hepatitis C ultimately receive treatment.⁸

The risk factors:

You may be at increased risk for hepatitis C infection if you:

- Are exposed to blood through your work
- Were born between 1945 and 1965
- Have injected recreational drugs and shared needles
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992 (when blood and organs started being screened for hepatitis C)
- Have had a tattoo or body piercing done with unsterile equipment
- Were treated for a blood clotting problem before 1987
- Are on long-term hemodialysis
- Are infected with HIV

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Think About the Link[®] campaign:

Think About the Link[®] is a prevention and education campaign from the *Prevent Cancer Foundation*[®] to advance awareness of the connection between certain viruses and cancer. The campaign focuses on three viruses linked to cancer: human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B and hepatitis C. *Think About the Link*[®] aims to increase screening rates for the viruses, increase immunization rates for HPV and hepatitis B and raise awareness of available treatment options for hepatitis C.

REFERENCES

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- 2 CDC. "Hepatitis C Disproportionately Affects the African American Community." <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/blackhistmnth-hepc.htm>
- 3 CDC. "Leading Causes of Death, Prevalence of Diseases and Risk Factors, and Use of Health Services Among Hispanics in the United States — 2009–2013." May 8, 2015.
- 4 CDC. "Hepatitis C." <http://www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis/Media/PDFs/FactSheet-Boomers.pdf>.
- 5 CDC. "Hepatitis C FAQs for the Public." January 8, 2016. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm>.
- 6 WHO. "Hepatitis C." July 2017. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs164/en/>.
- 7 CDC. "Liver Cancer." June 6, 2017. <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/liver/>
- 8 Islami, et.al. "Disparities in liver cancer occurrence in the United States by race/ethnicity and state." June 6 2017. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.3322/caac.21402/full>
- 9 Sourced from a survey conducted by the Prevent Cancer Foundation in partnership with Russell Research Firm.