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PROTECT YOURSELF

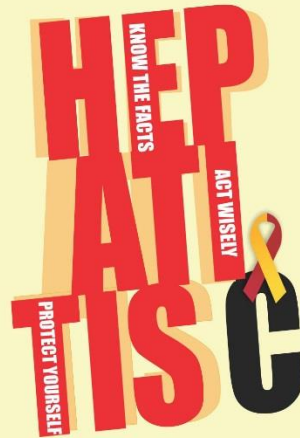


HEPATITIS C AND PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS

According to recent estimates, more than 185 million people around the world have been infected with Hepatitis C virus, of whom 350,000 die each year. Despite the high prevalence of disease, most people infected with Hepatitis C are unaware of their infection. For many who have been diagnosed, treatment remains unavailable. Treatment is successful in the majority of persons treated. People who inject drugs are at great risk of being infected with Hepatitis C.

WHAT IS HEPATITIS?

'Hepatitis' means inflammation of the liver. Toxins, certain drugs, some diseases, heavy alcohol use, and bacterial and viral infections can all cause hepatitis.



IMPORTANCE OF LIVER IN THE HUMAN BODY

The liver filters and purifies everything we eat and drink, stores vitamins and iron and helps the blood to clot. It also produces certain very important chemicals in the body. These functions make the liver a vital organ and many other organs in turn become dependent on its performance. So when the liver does not perform optimally almost all aspects of the human body is affected and may prove fatal when malfunctioning is prolonged.

Hepatitis C is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV).



HOW DOES HCV AFFECT HEALTH?

Hepatitis C varies in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness. Hepatitis C can be either "acute" or "chronic."

ACUTE HEPATITIS C INFECTION

is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the HCV. Eighty percent of people do not show any symptoms during acute infection, so HCV is rarely diagnosed at this time.

Affected persons may have mild symptoms such as:

- Feeling tired
- Stomach pain
- Feeling sick in the stomach

25% of people with acute Hepatitis C fully recover during this time. About 75% of people with acute Hepatitis C develop long-term or chronic HCV.

CHRONIC HEPATITIS C INFECTION

is a long-term illness that occurs when HCV remains in a person's body.

The virus stays in the body and may be silently damaging the liver over a long period of time (20 years or more).

HOW CAN ONE GET INFECTED WITH HCV? People can become infected with HCV when:



- Sharing needles, syringes, or other injecting paraphernalia (drugs, cooker/spoon, drug mixing containers, water, cotton wool/filter, tourniquet) used to inject drugs.
- Needle stick injuries in health care settings.

- Being born to a mother with Hepatitis C infection.
- Traditional practices- circumcision, tattooing and scarification with contaminated instruments.



Less commonly, people can also get HCV infection through:

- Sharing personal care items (shaving razors, toothbrush, Manicure or pedicure tools) coming in contact with another person's blood.
- Having unprotected sexual contact with a person infected with HCV.



PEOPLE AFFECTED WITH CHRONIC HEPATITIS C

- May have no signs or symptoms of liver disease for a long time.
- May not feel sick and may not feel it necessary to go to the doctor in the earlier stages.
- Some may show symptoms only in the advanced stages.



One third of those who become chronically infected are at risk of developing liver cirrhosis or liver cancer.

TALK TEST TREAT

Presented by:
UNODC
 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
 Project RAS/H13: Prevention of transmission of HIV among drug users in SAARC countries.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF CHRONIC INFECTION

- Yellowing of skin and eyes
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeping problem at night
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain



WHO IS AT RISK?

People who are at increased risk of HCV infection include:

- People who inject drugs and share injecting equipments
- People who use intranasal drugs
- People who receive unscreened blood or blood products
- People who undergo invasive procedures (surgery, endoscopy, biopsy, etc. in health-care facilities with inadequate infection control practices)
- Children born to mothers infected with HCV
- People with sex partners who are HCV-infected
- People with HIV infection
- People who undergo tattooing or piercing

HOW IS HCV NOT SPREAD?

Hepatitis C virus is not spread by sharing utensils, eating, breast feeding, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing. It is also not spread through food or water.



WHY ARE PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS MORE AT RISK OF HCV INFECTION?



People who inject drugs often also share injecting equipment (needles, syringes, drugs, cooker/ spoon, drug mixing containers, water, cotton wool/ filter, tourniquet).

HCV is a much stronger virus than HIV and can survive outside the body at room temperatures, on exposed surfaces, for a long time. Thus HCV can remain active in the used needle syringes and other equipment causing infection when reused.

HOW TO PREVENT?

For prevention of HCV transmission among IDUs, a new needle and syringe is required for every injection episode and it is important not to use injection paraphernalia (drugs, cooker/spoon, drug mixing containers, water, cotton wool/filter, tourniquet) used by someone else. Joining Opioid Substitution Therapy reduces injecting and thereby also lowers chances of HCV transmission.

For all:

- Do not use personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person's blood, such as razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes, or glucose monitors.
- Do not get tattoos or body piercings from an unlicensed facility or in an informal setting.
- Do not donate blood or body organs if you are infected with Hep C.
- Practice safe sex

HOW TO DIAGNOSE?



3 tests are required for HCV diagnosis:

1st test – is a HCV antibody test. If positive, will mean that one was infected with the virus at some point of life. At times antibody test results are falsely negative even when someone does have chronic hepatitis C infection and may need to be repeated.

2nd test – is a viral load or HCV RNA test required to confirm if HCV is still remaining in the body. A positive result confirms chronic hepatitis C infection. Two successive negative test results (with a gap of 6 months) will indicate that the body has cleared HCV, and no further testing or treatment is required.

The **3rd test** is for those with chronic hepatitis C infection and needs to be conducted to determine the genotype of the HCV. This is essential to plan when to start and how long to stay on treatment.



GET YOURSELF TESTED TODAY!

'WINDOW PERIOD' FOR HCV

Once a virus enters the body it takes a period of time before antibodies are produced. Thus, an antibody test carried out too soon following exposure may give a 'false negative' result.

It takes up to 12 weeks for an accurate result and this is called the HCV antibody window period.

With HCV RNA (often called PCR) testing the window period for confirming a chronic Hepatitis C infection is 3 weeks.

PROGRESSION OF HEPATITIS C

Alcohol facilitates the progression of HCV infection to severe liver disease. Other factors facilitating the progression include:

- HIV co-infection
- Chronic Hepatitis B infection
- Age above 40 when infected and being male.



TREATMENT OF CHRONIC HEPATITIS C INFECTION

Hepatitis C infection differs from other chronic viral infections, notably HIV infection, as it can be cured by treatment. Several medicines are available to treat persons infected with HCV, and cure rates have steadily improved with the introduction of newer medicines.

Currently chronic Hepatitis C infection is treated with antiviral medications aimed at clearing the virus from one's body. Doctors usually recommend a combination of two to three medications to be taken over several months or longer, depending on the genotype. Treatment for hepatitis C infection is currently not provided in government hospitals in most states of India.

WHAT FACTORS AFFECT THE OUTCOME OF HCV TREATMENT?

The most important factors that affect treatment outcome is the Hepatitis C genotype. Other factors that increase success rates are:

- Being younger
- Having Hepatitis C for a shorter time
- A low Hepatitis C viral count
- Moderate scarring of the liver (fibrosis), not severe scarring (cirrhosis)
- Taking medications as prescribed; not missing doses
- Maintaining ideal body weight (avoid obesity)
- Avoiding alcohol and marijuana.

PRECAUTIONS FOR THOSE INFECTED WITH CHRONIC HEPATITIS C

- Certain drugs like the commonly used paracetamol harm the liver. Those infected need to consult a doctor to know which drugs affect the liver.
- Proper diet, regular exercise and healthy lifestyle are helpful.



HIV and HCV:



Co-infection with HIV and HCV is of special concern, especially for those injecting drugs and using alcohol. HIV infection increases the rate of progression for HCV disease and liver cirrhosis. It is a major cause of hospitalisation and death for co-infected individuals.

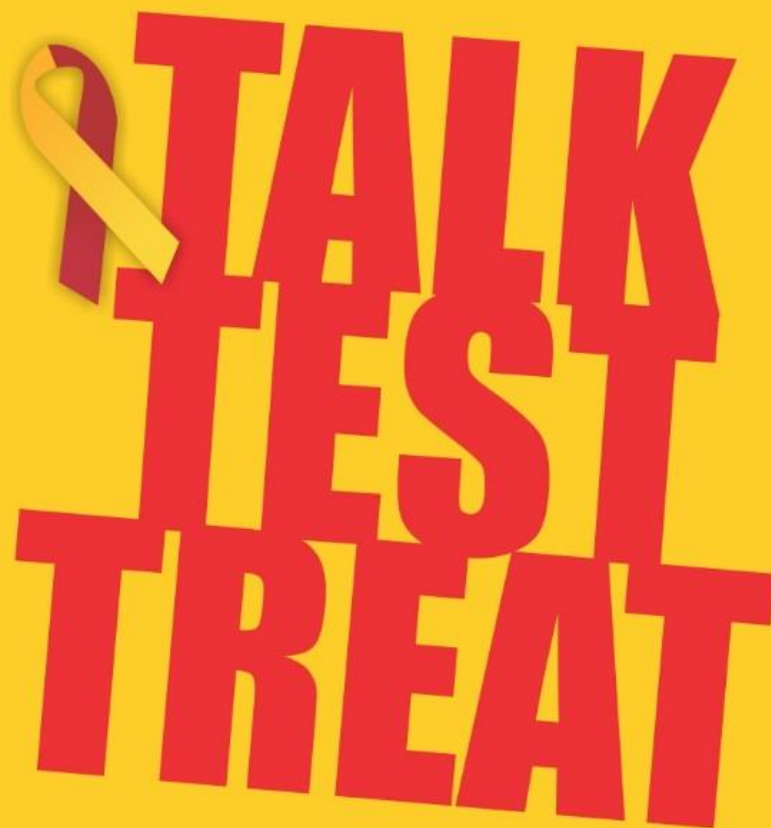
In HIV-negative people, HCV progresses very slowly, usually over decades giving more time to seek treatment and recover.

Many people live with both HIV and HCV for several years, often without knowing that they are co-infected.

The risk of serious liver damage is greatest among HIV-positive people with less than 200 CD4 cells when co infected with HCV.

Hepatitis C infection does not worsen HIV but may complicate HIV treatment as many ARVs affect liver function. Hence co-infected people are at greater risk of ART associated liver problems.

But it is always more beneficial to be treated for HIV than the risk of liver toxicity.



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