

What to ask your Doctor before being tested.

- What is hepatitis C?
- What is antibody testing for hepatitis C?
- What does a positive test result mean?
- What does a negative test result mean?
- Who will be notified of my status?
- How will my personal information be kept private?
- Where can I get support?
- Who should I tell if I'm HCV positive?
- How can I reduce risks and prevent giving this to someone else?
- How will being HCV positive or negative affect me medically, psychologically, socially and legally?

Where to Get Help & Information

The Hepatitis Council of WA (Inc) is a non government organisation, providing information, support, referral and pre and post test discussions. One to one support/counseling is available for people infected with or affected by (partners, family etc.) hepatitis C. Educational sessions are available for businesses and community groups.

Telephone Information & Support
(9am - 5pm Monday to Friday)
(08) 9328 8538 Metro;
1800 800 070 Country;
or Email: info@hepatitiswa.com.au
Web site: www.hepatitiswa.com.au

For further information, contact your local doctor.

Information and advice is also available from:
ADIS (Alcohol and Drug Information Service) on
(08) 9442 5000 Metro; 1800 198 024 Country.
WASUA (Western Australian Substance User's
Association Inc) on (08) 9227 7866.

Other Brochures:

Could You Have Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C & Your Liver

HEP-



**Getting tested for
Hepatitis C:**

Pre-test information.

Produced by
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**Hepatitis Council
of Western Australia**



INFORMATION & SUPPORT

**Metro 9328 8538
Country 1800 800 070**

Did You Know?

Over 250,000 Australians have chronic hepatitis C (HCV). There are approximately 13,000 new infections each year, that is approximately 36 new infections each day.

Chronic means that they have had hepatitis C for longer than 6 months, it does not refer to the severity of liver damage that may occur. If you have hepatitis C there is a lot you can do to prevent harm to yourself and others.

How Is It Spread?

Hepatitis C is inflammation of the liver caused by infection with one of the many known strains of the hepatitis C virus (HCV). It is spread by one person's blood infecting another person's blood. You're most at risk of getting HCV if you have:

- Received infected blood or blood products (before February 1990 in Australia).
- Injected drugs with shared equipment (even if you injected just once in your life or many years ago).
- Been vaccinated with a needle and syringe that was used to inject others in a group vaccination program.

Other things that put you at risk are:

- Injury with contaminated sharp instruments or handling bloody items (eg at work);
- Sharing contaminated toiletry items (eg razor, toothbrush, nail file);
- Tattooing and body piercing with shared contaminated equipment;
- Unprotected sexual intercourse when there is blood present;
- If you have ever been in prison.

Why get Tested?

You may not know that you have been exposed to HCV. So being tested lets you and your doctor monitor your condition, consider your options and make treatment decisions.

Getting tested also helps you make decisions about your life. For instance drinking alcohol. Alcohol speeds up liver damage. If you know that you have HCV and stop or limit your drinking, you can significantly reduce liver damage.

You can be infected more than once with HCV or infected with other strains of the virus. You can have HCV and feel well, but still pass it on to others. If you test positive you can take steps to prevent giving the virus to someone else.

Tests for Hepatitis C

HCV Antibody Test (Anti-HCV enzyme immunoassay - EIA Test)

Determines whether you have been exposed to the Hep C virus by looking for HCV antibodies in your blood. Your immune system produces antibodies to fight infections. If you have been exposed it can take up to 6 months for HCV antibodies to be detected; this is known as the window period. During this window period test results may not be accurate.

(It is also important to understand that the presence of HCV antibodies in your blood does not give you immunity to other strains of the Hep C virus.)

A Positive Test Result

A positive test result only demonstrates you have been exposed to the Hep C virus. It does not show if it is:

- a past infection that you have cleared,
- a past infection you still have, or
- a new infection of HCV you have just contracted.

A Negative Test Result

A negative result could mean one of a number of things. It could mean that you are not infected with HCV. It could mean that you were tested during the window period. It could mean that you are not producing detectable amounts of antibody even though you are infected. Your doctor can advise you if you should be tested again.

HCV RNA (by PCR - Polymerase Chain Reaction Tests)

HCV RNA (qualitative by PCR):

Looks for the presence of HCV RNA in your blood. RNA is the genetic material of the virus.

HCV RNA viral load (quantitative):

Records the amount of virus circulating in your blood.

Other Tests:

HCV genotype test:

Identifies the dominant genotype of HCV you are infected with.

Genotype and viral load status are used to predict treatment duration and response.

Making Your Own Decision

You should decide whether or not to be tested for hepatitis C. It's important that you understand the possible consequences of a positive result and of a negative result before being tested. Your doctor must get your permission before you are tested.

Notification of Results

Hepatitis C is one of the many communicable diseases that the Department of Health keeps track of. This allows the Department to allocate health care resources for affected people in WA, and to plan prevention strategies to reduce the spread of hepatitis C.

If you test positive for hepatitis C your doctor is required by law to inform the Department of Health. He/she will give your personal details to the Department of Health. The Department of Health will not disclose your personal details to anyone else.

Getting Your Results

It may take 7-14 days for the results of your test for antibodies to HCV to come back.

It is best if your doctor gives you the results in person so that he/she can explain the results, give you information, and recommend follow-up.