




Hepatitis C: Household Transmission

This fact sheet has been produced by the Hepatitis Council of WA; it is intended to act as a guide for all members of the community to prevent blood borne virus transmission in the home. Topics covered are:

-  Hepatitis C - overview
-  Transmission of hepatitis C
-  Precautions at home

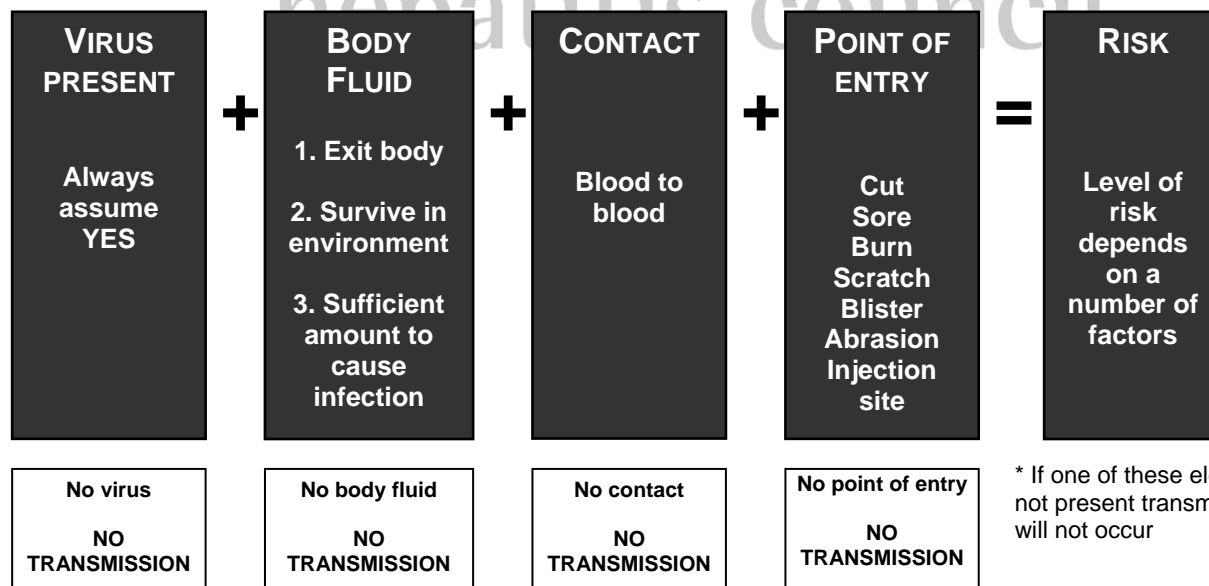
-  Blood spills
-  First Aid

Hepatitis C – an overview

- Hepatitis C is a virus that affects the liver; it is transmitted by blood to blood contact
- In Australia there are over 200,000 people living with hepatitis C (approximately 1%)
- About 25% of people exposed to the virus will clear it naturally, however, they will not become immune to re-infection
- There is no vaccine for hepatitis C
- There are over 50 different types (strains) of hepatitis C and a person can be infected with more than one strain (or ‘genotype’)
- The virus affects different people in different ways. The majority of people with hepatitis C will have no or very few health problems; a small number of people will develop cirrhosis and/or liver cancer
- Treatment and support services are available (visit www.hepatitiswa.com.au for details)

Transmission of hepatitis C

- Hepatitis C is spread through **blood to blood** contact (e.g. sharing injecting equipment, unsterile tattooing and piercing)
- Hepatitis C is NOT spread through social contact. Hugging, kissing, sharing food, drinks, plates, eating utensils, sneezing, coughing, washing clothes in the same machine or using the same bathroom facilities do not pose a risk of hepatitis C transmission.
- Mosquitoes or other insects do not transmit hepatitis C
- Some personal care objects (toiletries), if shared, can transmit hepatitis C
- To determine the risk of blood-borne virus transmission use the following equation:



Precautions at home

- Cover all cuts and sores with waterproof dressings
- Always use disposable gloves when cleaning up blood spills (see next section)
- Transmission of hepatitis C may occur through sharing personal grooming items such as razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes or enema equipment, therefore keep bathroom items separate and out of reach of children
- Washing hands with soap and running water will help remove germs from the skin, and is the simplest way to prevent infection
- Hepatitis C is not classified as a sexually transmitted infection (STI) as it is only transmitted by blood to blood contact, but safer sex should always be practiced
- All blood-stained items (sanitary towels, tampons, dressings, tissues, gloves etc) should be placed in a leak-proof plastic bag, tied securely then placed in a second plastic bag. This can then be disposed of in domestic waste.

Blood spills

- Where possible, blood spills should be promptly attended to by the *injured* individual
- Always wear disposable gloves when cleaning up any blood spill
- Wash the area thoroughly with lukewarm soapy water (extremely cold or hot water coagulates blood, which makes it harder to clean the area effectively)
- Disinfect the area (e.g. with bleach)
- Place any bloodied materials in two plastic bags, one inside the other (including the gloves used for cleaning) and discard into domestic waste
- Wash any clothes with small blood splatters in cold water in the normal manner
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap under running water for at least 30 seconds

First Aid

- Adhere to the recommended principles of First Aid: DRABCD
- Intact skin is the best defence – cover all cuts and abrasions with a waterproof dressing
- Theoretically, there is a *low* risk of blood-borne virus transmission when giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation; however, people trained in First Aid should not hesitate to give life support if needed. Single use plastic masks can act as a barrier to prevent blood-borne virus transmission (a t-shirt can also be used in place of a mask and can reduce the risk of transmission).

For more information contact the Hepatitis Council of WA on
(08) 9227 9800 or info@hepatitiswa.com.au or visit www.hepatitiswa.com.au

