

# The ABCs of Viral Hepatitis

Millions of Americans have viral hepatitis and an estimated 72,000 become infected each year. When a person first gets viral hepatitis, he or she can develop a very mild illness with few or no symptoms or get a more serious illness lasting months. Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can progress to a “chronic” or lifelong infection, which can cause serious health problems including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. Most people with chronic hepatitis do not know they are infected and can live with the disease for decades without having symptoms, or feeling sick.

	Hepatitis A	Hepatitis B	Hepatitis C
<b>Important facts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dramatic decreases in the U.S. over the last 20 years largely due to vaccination efforts</li> <li>Outbreaks still occur in the U.S.</li> <li>Common in many countries, especially those without modern sanitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50-100 times more infectious than HIV</li> <li>Approximately 350 million people worldwide have Hepatitis B</li> <li>An estimated two-thirds of people with Hepatitis B do not know they are infected</li> <li>1 in 12 Asian Americans has chronic Hepatitis B</li> <li>A leading cause of liver cancer, especially among Asian Americans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An estimated 75% of people do not know they are infected</li> <li>Of people with chronic Hepatitis C, 3 out of every 4 are baby boomers or people born from 1945–1965</li> <li>Twice as common among African Americans as whites</li> <li>The leading cause of liver transplants and also causes liver cancer</li> <li>Many people don't know how or when they got infected</li> </ul>
<b>Can it become a chronic infection?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
<b>Is there a vaccine?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>
<b>U.S. statistics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About 17,000 new infections each year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Estimated 1.2 million people have chronic Hepatitis B</li> <li>About 38,000 new infections each year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Estimated 3.2 million people have chronic Hepatitis C</li> <li>About 17,000 new infections each year</li> </ul>
<b>What causes it?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hepatitis A virus (HAV)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hepatitis B virus (HBV)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hepatitis C virus (HCV)</li> </ul>
<b>Where is the virus found in the body?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood, semen, vaginal fluid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood</li> </ul>
<b>How is it spread?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ingestion of food, water, or other objects contaminated with fecal matter from an infected person (even in microscopic amounts)</li> <li>Sex with an infected person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact with blood, semen, or other body fluids from an infected person (even in microscopic amounts)</li> <li>Sex with an infected person</li> <li>Sharing personal items that have been contaminated with blood from an infected person, such as toothbrushes, razors or glucose monitors</li> <li>An infected mother can pass it to her baby at birth</li> <li>Poor infection control has resulted in outbreaks in outpatient health care and residential care facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact with blood from an infected person (even in microscopic amounts)</li> <li>Sharing equipment that has been contaminated with blood from an infected person, such as needles, syringes, poorly sterilized tattoo or piercing equipment, and even medical equipment, such as glucose monitors</li> <li>Receiving a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992 (when the widespread screening of blood began)</li> <li>Poor infection control has resulted in outbreaks in outpatient health care and residential care facilities</li> </ul>
<b>What happens if someone is infected?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People can be sick for a few weeks to a few months</li> <li>Most recover with no lasting liver damage</li> <li>Rarely fatal, although mortality is highest among the elderly and those with underlying liver disease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many newly infected persons are sick for a few weeks to a few months, while others have no symptoms</li> <li>Some people develop a chronic infection</li> <li>15%-25% of people with a chronic infection develop chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, liver failure, or liver cancer</li> <li>Medical treatment is available</li> <li>About 3,000 people die every year from Hepatitis B-related liver disease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>75%-85% of people with Hepatitis C develop a chronic infection</li> <li>5%-20% of people with chronic Hepatitis C develop cirrhosis over a period of 20-30 years</li> <li>Medical treatment is available</li> <li>1%-5% of people with a chronic infection die from cirrhosis or liver cancer</li> <li>Approximately 15,000 people die every year from Hepatitis C-related liver disease</li> </ul>
<b>Public health strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vaccinate all children at age 1 year</li> <li>Vaccinate adults at risk</li> <li>Ensure safe food and water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test people most likely to be infected (e.g. people born in Asia, Africa, and other regions with high rates of Hepatitis B)</li> <li>Test all pregnant women</li> <li>Vaccinate all infants at birth</li> <li>Vaccinate adults at risk</li> <li>Vaccinate all adults, age 19–59, diagnosed with diabetes</li> <li>Ensure good infection control in health care and public safety settings</li> <li>Educate populations at high risk</li> <li>Increase early detection and link to care and treatment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test all baby boomers, or people born from 1945 through 1965</li> <li>Test those at risk for Hepatitis C</li> <li>Screen blood and organ donors</li> <li>Reduce risk behaviors (e.g., injection drug use)</li> <li>Ensure good infection control in health care and public safety settings</li> <li>Educate populations at high risk</li> <li>Increase early detection and link to care and treatment</li> </ul>



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)

August 2012