

Hepatitis C in Ethnocultural Communities in Canada

A Training Guide for Community Care,
Health, and Social Service Providers

Produced by

The Canadian Ethnocultural Council

In collaboration with

The Canadian Liver Foundation

Funded by

The Public Health Agency of Canada

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

- ✘ First identified in 1989
- ✘ Blood-borne virus, infects liver
- ✘ 170 M people infected Worldwide
- ✘ 242,500 people infected in Canada
- ✘ 8,000 people newly infected in 2007

From 1960 to 1990 an estimated 90,000 to 160,000 Canadians contracted hepatitis C through infected blood or blood products

Prevalence

- ✘ Prevalence is 3% or higher in some of the countries from which Canada gets immigrants
 - + People's Republic of China
 - + Egypt
 - + Philippines
 - + Vietnam

- ✘ Common causes of hepatitis C transmission
 - + Cultural practices
 - ✘ Rubbing skin with coins until there is bleeding
 - + Improperly sterilized hypodermic needles

Canadian Public Awareness

- ✘ General public awareness is low
- ✘ Little has been done to educate
 - + General public
 - + People with low literacy
 - + People from diverse cultural, linguistic backgrounds
- ✘ As a result, infected individuals
 - + Are unaware they have the disease
 - + Unknowingly transmit the virus
 - + Do not take precautions to safeguard their health
 - + Do not seek treatment

Stigma

- ✘ Many cultural taboos exist
- ✘ Talking about the disease is a taboo
 - + Association with drug use and alcohol abuse
 - + Fear of being stigmatized and labeled
- ✘ Individuals experience
 - + Shame and isolation
 - + Fear being ostracized by communities
- ✘ Result
 - + Reluctant to access care, treatment or obtain knowledge
 - + Further spread of the disease

What is hepatitis?

- ✘ Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver
- ✘ If caused by a virus, it is referred to as viral hepatitis
- ✘ At least seven different viruses are known to cause hepatitis
- ✘ The most common ones in Canada are hepatitis A, B, and C

What is hepatitis C?

- ✘ Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus, a blood-borne virus
- ✘ It is spread by direct exposure to infected
 - + Blood
 - + Body fluids containing blood
- ✘ It is a major cause of chronic liver disease
- ✘ Out of every 100 people infected with hepatitis C
 - + ~75 – 80% develop chronic infection
 - + ~10 – 20% develop cirrhosis over 20 – 30 years
 - + ~1 – 5% die from the consequences of long term infections including liver cancer

Hepatitis A, B and C - Differences

Hepatitis	C	A	B
Caused by	Hepatitis C virus	Hepatitis A virus	Hepatitis B virus
Spread by	Blood, body fluids containing blood	Fecal-oral route via raw seafood, shellfish, contaminated water, ice cubes	Blood, body fluids Sexual contact Infected mother → child at birth

Common Risk Factors

- ✘ Injection drug use (past or present)
- ✘ Intranasal drug use (snorting)
- ✘ Sharing needles, straws, pipes, spoon, cookers, etc.
- ✘ Tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture
 - + using unsterile equipment, ink or techniques
- ✘ Workplace exposure via needle-stick injury
- ✘ Improperly sterilized medical, dental equipment
- ✘ Sharing personal care articles
 - + Razors, scissors, nail clippers, or tooth brushes
- ✘ Unprotected sexual activity that includes contact with blood
- ✘ Being born to a mother who has the hepatitis C virus

Can hepatitis C be prevented?

- ✘ The only effective prevention method
 - + Avoid contact with infected blood.
- ✘ Prevention
 - + Do not share needles, syringes, spoons, drug solutions, water, cookers, pipes, straws for snorting drugs, and other paraphernalia
 - + Only use fresh ink and single use, disposable needles for tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture, etc.
 - + Sterilize all equipment, including the ink
 - + Wear latex gloves if contact with another person's blood is likely
 - + Practice safer sex
 - + In non-monogamous relationships or with new sexual partners, use condoms
 - ✘ Sexual transmission rare in monogamous, long-term relationships

Can you infect family, friends?

✘ Yes!

✘ How to decrease risk

- + Do not share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, etc.
- + Cover any open wounds or sores with a bandage
- + Dispose blood-contaminated items in containers
 - ✘ Tampons, sanitary napkins, tissues, bandages, needles, etc.
- + Do not share needles, straws, or other drug paraphernalia (containers, cookers, filters, or water)
- + Do not nurse with cracked or bleeding nipples

✘ Always use condoms

- + Particularly if not in a long-term, monogamous relationship
 - ✘ Protect partners from hepatitis C
 - ✘ Reduce transmission risk of other infections (hepatitis B, HIV, etc.)

Symptoms

- ✘ Many people have no symptoms
 - + They may even feel quite healthy
- ✘ Symptoms include
 - + Fatigue
 - + Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
 - + Abdominal and joint pain
 - + Dark urine
 - + Nausea
 - + Loss of appetite

Who should be tested?

- ✘ Anyone who has done something that could put them at risk
 - + Even once or a long time ago
- ✘ Anyone with signs or symptoms of hepatitis C
 - + Nausea, fatigue, reduced appetite, jaundice, dark urine, and abdominal pain, etc.
- ✘ Anyone who was born or has resided in countries where hepatitis C is common
 - + Egypt, southern Italy, India, Pakistan, China, The Philippines, and Vietnam
 - + Particularly if exposed to blood products, medical procedures, or vaccinations in these countries

What are the tests?

- ✘ There are several tests
- ✘ Different tests help decide on the appropriate treatment
- ✘ Consult a health care provider who will request the appropriate test

- ✘ The Anti-HCV test
 - + Looks for antibodies to HCV
 - + If positive, the individual was once infected with the virus

- ✘ The HCV RNA tests
 - + Indicates whether the individual still has the virus
 - + How much of the virus is in the blood

- ✘ The HCV genotyping test
 - + Tells the type (or genotype) of HCV

- ✘ Liver function and liver enzymes tests
 - + Determine whether HCV is damaging the liver

- ✘ Liver biopsy
 - + Shows the cumulative damage done to the liver by the virus, fat and alcohol

Can you get hepatitis C again?

- ✘ Yes!
- ✘ The immune system makes antibodies to hepatitis C
- ✘ The virus changes too quickly for the immune system
- ✘ Antibodies no longer offer protection
- ✘ Therefore, no one has lifelong immunity

Is there a vaccine?

- ✘ No hepatitis C vaccine exists at this time
- ✘ Even people who have been successfully treated for HCV can be reinfected
- ✘ Individuals' actions affect their risk level for reinfection

What is the treatment?

- ✘ Effective treatment for hepatitis C is available
 - + Combination of pegylated interferon and ribavirin
- ✘ If treatment is prescribed, the individual and doctor should consider
 - + What is the current treatment for hepatitis C?
 - + How effective is the treatment?
 - + What are the side effects of the treatment?
 - + Who is a candidate for the treatment?
 - + How does someone get treatment?
- ✘ To prevent further liver damage
 - + Vaccinate against HAV and HBV
 - + Vaccines for both hepatitis A and B exist
 - + Many provinces and territories provide vaccines free of cost

Alternative Therapies?

- ✘ No alternative therapy has been proven safe and effective for treating hepatitis C
 - + Homeopathy, herbal medicine, vitamins, minerals, etc.
- ✘ Most alternative therapists are not regulated by provincial and territorial laws
- ✘ For information on risks/benefits of alternative therapies
 - + Look for a professional therapist
 - + Therapist should have a good understanding of hepatitis C

How is hepatitis C managed?

- ✘ To stay healthy and reduce stress on the liver
 - + Avoid or limit alcohol
 - + Avoid or limit tobacco
 - + Eat healthily
 - ✘ See guidelines *“Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide”*
 - + Avoid other liver damaging illnesses like hepatitis A and B
 - + Avoid “street” drugs, including marijuana
 - + Practice safer sex
 - + Be physically active
 - + Sleep adequately

Some Useful Web sites

- ✘ Canadian Liver Foundation

 - + <http://www.liver.ca>

- ✘ Government of Ontario

 - + www.hepcontario.ca

- ✘ Health Canada

 - + <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

 - + <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodnatur/index-eng.php>

- ✘ Public Health Agency of Canada

 - + <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hepc>

References Cited

- ✘ Hepatitis C – Get the Facts

 - + Public Health Agency of Canada

 - ✘ www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hepc/index_e.html

- ✘ Healthy Living with Hepatitis C

 - + Canadian Liver Foundation

 - ✘ www.liver.ca

- ✘ Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

 - + Health Canada

 - ✘ www.hc-gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e/html