

HEPATITIS C

Definition: Hepatitis C is a liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus. It can range 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 virus infection is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis C virus. For most people, acute infection leads to chronic infection. Chronic Hepatitis C is a serious disease than can result in long-term health problems, or even death.

Transmission: Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. Today, most people become infected with the Hepatitis C virus by sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs. Before 1992, when widespread screening of the blood supply began in the United States, Hepatitis C was also commonly spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants.

Symptoms: Approximately 70%–80% of people with acute Hepatitis C do not have any symptoms. Some people, however, can have mild to severe symptoms soon after being infected, including

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellow color in the skin or eyes)

Precautions and PPE considerations: This is a blood borne exposure based pathogen. Glove usage is required and masks and gloves are highly recommended.

Treatments: The treatment most often used for Hepatitis C is a combination of two medicines, interferon and ribavirin. However, not every person with chronic Hepatitis C needs or will benefit from treatment. In addition, the drugs may cause serious side effects in some patients

Work Guidelines: If an exposure occurs you will consult with the infectious disease doctor.