

Should I Get Tested for Hepatitis C?

Talk with your VA health care provider about being tested if you:

- ▶ Want to be tested
- ▶ Were born between 1945 and 1965
- ▶ Are a Vietnam-era Veteran (dates of service 1964 through 1975)
- ▶ Are a current or former injection drug user
- ▶ Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before 1992
- ▶ Are on hemodialysis treatment
- ▶ Work in health care or public safety and had a recent needle stick or injury or mucosal exposure to HCV-positive blood
- ▶ Obtained tattoos or body-piercings in non-regulated settings
- ▶ Have ever shared equipment to snort drugs
- ▶ Had 50 or more sex partners
- ▶ Have a current or past sex partner with HCV infection
- ▶ Are infected with HIV
- ▶ Were treated for a blood clotting problem before 1987
- ▶ Have an abnormal liver test result
- ▶ Were born to a mother who was infected with HCV
- ▶ Were incarcerated

If you are at risk of hepatitis C, you should consider getting tested. You have to get blood tests to find out if you have HCV because the symptoms of hepatitis C infection often are very mild. In fact, you may not have any symptoms at all.



Things to remember about getting tested for hepatitis C in the VA system:

- ▶ Testing is voluntary. It is a decision that you and your doctor can make together.
- ▶ If you prefer to get tested outside the VA, check insurance coverage requirements.
- ▶ Refusing to take a test for hepatitis C will not prevent you from receiving other medical care at VA, but your health care provider may not have all the information necessary to take the best care of you.
- ▶ Your test results will be entered into your medical record.
- ▶ You won't lose your VA benefits just because you engage in certain drug use or sexual behaviors.

Benefits of HCV Testing:

- ▶ VA has treatments for HCV that are very effective in curing the virus with few side effects.
- ▶ If you are infected with HCV, knowing allows you to avoid activities that could further damage your liver. Symptoms of HCV usually do not occur for 20-30 years after initial infection. Drinking alcohol while infected with HCV may speed up the destruction of the liver.
- ▶ If you are not infected with HCV, you may feel less anxious after testing and more committed to prevention.
- ▶ You can better protect people around you if you know you are infected with HCV.
- ▶ Early treatment of HCV will prevent progression of liver damage, making cirrhosis and liver cancer less likely.

Risks of HCV Testing:

- ▶ You may experience sadness, depression, anxiety, or guilt if you are infected with HCV. Your VA health care provider is available to answer your questions and help you cope with these feelings. Fortunately, HCV can now be cured in most people, so talk to your doctor about getting treatment right away.
- ▶ The results will be entered into your medical record, which is confidential but not anonymous. If you sign a release of information (ROI) form, individuals outside VA may see the test results.
- ▶ Positive results of HCV testing may be reported to a state health agency; however, your name will not be shared.

How can I get more information?

Call your local VA medical center and visit the VA Viral Hepatitis website: <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov>