

FAQs about Sustained Virologic Response to Treatment for Hepatitis C

What is sustained virologic response (SVR)?

▶ Sustained virologic response means that the hepatitis C virus is not detected in the blood 12 weeks or more after completing treatment.

Is SVR the same as “cure”?

▶ About 99% of people are considered cured of their infection when the virus is not detected 12 weeks or more after completing treatment.

Can the virus return after an SVR?

▶ Chances are very low for the virus to be detected again after SVR is achieved. Studies have shown this type of relapse occurs in less than 1% of patients who complete treatment.

The virus is more likely to return as a result of re-infection (new infection from exposure to someone else who is infected with hepatitis C).

Is there a risk that I could pass hepatitis C to others after I have an SVR?

▶ No, after SVR, the hepatitis C virus is no longer in your bloodstream and you cannot infect other people.

Could I get infected with hepatitis C again?

▶ If you are exposed to hepatitis C again, you can be re-infected with the hepatitis C virus.

▶ Risk factors for re-infection with hepatitis C include: sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject or snort drugs; needle stick injuries in health care settings; sharing items that may have come in contact with another person’s blood, such as razors, toothbrushes, or homemade tattoo equipment; or having unprotected sexual contact.

After SVR, what happens to my liver?

▶ In most cases, once SVR is achieved, additional liver damage from the hepatitis C virus stops. Liver enzyme tests often return to normal and liver function improves.

▶ SVR does not guarantee that the liver will heal from existing scarring or damage. The progression of cirrhosis and other liver-related complications is much lower after SVR.

▶ Liver damage can continue to occur if you drink alcohol or if you have “fatty liver disease.”

After SVR, what other tests do I need?

▶ Because of rare relapse, some providers will check for hepatitis C virus one more time, around 6-12 months after treatment is completed.

▶ Liver function blood tests may be checked periodically at the discretion of your primary care or liver provider.

▶ If you have advanced scarring or cirrhosis, talk with your provider to see if further testing is recommended and to come up with a monitoring plan.

After SVR, can I donate blood?

▶ After SVR, the specific RNA test will be undetectable, but the hepatitis C antibody test will remain positive forever. For this reason, even though the virus is gone from your blood, you are still not allowed to donate blood.

