



# GEORGIAN BAY WOMEN\*S CLINIC

## Hepatitis C: What You Should Know

### What's Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver infection caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). It can be a short-term (acute) illness, but for most people, it becomes a long-term (chronic) infection. Chronic Hepatitis C can lead to serious liver problems, including cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer. It spreads through contact with blood from an infected person.

### What Are the Symptoms?

Many people with Hepatitis C don't have symptoms, so they might not know they have it. But if symptoms do show up, they can include:

#### Early Symptoms

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain

- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain

Later Symptoms (if chronic and liver damage occurs).

- Yellowing of the skin and the whites of your eyes (jaundice)
- Easy bruising and bleeding
- Swelling in the legs and abdomen
- Weight loss
- Confusion, drowsiness, and slurred speech (due to toxins building up in the brain)

## **How Can You Prevent It?**

**Avoid Sharing Needles:** Don't share needles or other drug paraphernalia.

**Safe Piercing and Tattoos:** Make sure any piercing or tattooing is done with sterile equipment.

**Be Cautious with Blood:** Avoid direct contact with blood and body fluids. Use gloves if you need to handle blood.

**Practice Safe Sex:** Use condoms, especially if you have multiple partners or are unsure of your partner's health status.

## **How Do You Get Tested?**

**Blood Test:** Hepatitis C is diagnosed through blood tests that check for the presence of the virus or antibodies against the virus. Follow-up tests may be needed to determine if the infection is acute or chronic.

## **How Is It Treated?**

**Antiviral Medications:** Hepatitis C is treated with antiviral medications that can cure the infection. Treatment plans can vary, so it's important to follow your healthcare provider's recommendations.

**Regular Monitoring:** Regular check-ups and blood tests are crucial to monitor liver health and the effectiveness of treatment.

## **Follow-Up**

**Regular Monitoring:** If you have chronic Hepatitis C, regular check-ups and blood tests are important to keep an eye on your liver health.

**Healthy Lifestyle:** Avoid alcohol and drugs that can harm your liver. Maintain a healthy diet and exercise regularly.

**Vaccinations:** Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B to protect your liver from further damage.

**Remember:**

- Hepatitis C is often a silent infection, so regular testing is crucial, especially if you're at risk.
- Chronic Hepatitis C can lead to serious liver damage, but effective treatments are available.
- If you think you might have Hepatitis C or have been exposed to it, see your healthcare provider for testing and guidance.