

Get tested if at risk of hepatitis infection

Anyone who thinks they may be at risk from hepatitis B or C infection is reminded to get tested. Hepatitis B and C viruses can remain undetected in the body for a long time and can cause severe liver disease many years after infection.

How is hepatitis transmitted?

Viral [hepatitis](#) is a group of infectious diseases known as hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E. Although not very common in Northern Ireland, it is estimated 400 million people across the globe are infected.

The two main types of hepatitis are B and C. Both of these are spread by contact with the blood or bodily fluids of an infected person. They can cause liver cirrhosis and cancer.

[Hepatitis B](#) can be passed on:

- through having unprotected sex
- from mother to baby
- from contact with infected blood in areas of the world where hepatitis B is more common

[Hepatitis C](#) is more commonly associated with sharing needles or equipment for injecting drugs. It can also be spread by having had a tattoo or body piercing using non-sterile equipment.

Neither virus is easily spread through day-to-day contact. You cannot get hepatitis B or C by shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, sharing food, or by using the same toilet.

People are encouraged to come forward for testing if they have ever injected drugs, including steroids or tanning products, even if it was only once or some time ago.

Avoiding infection

It is important to know how to avoid becoming infected with hepatitis. This includes:

- practising safer sex
- avoiding getting tattoos abroad
- not sharing personal materials that may come into contact with blood (for example, needles, razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers)

Injecting equipment can be obtained from various needle exchange sites across

Northern Ireland to reduce the risk from these infections.

Treatment

Treatments are getting better all the time, so it is worth knowing if you have been infected. It is also important to protect your family if you are infected.

The treatments for hepatitis C are now so good they can cure nearly 100 per cent of cases. If you're treated straight away, not only can you prevent your liver becoming damaged, but you can reduce the chance of spreading the disease to others.

So, if you think you may have been exposed to the virus, even if this was many years ago, talk to [your GP](#) or nurse and get tested.

More useful links