

Hepatitis C

Good news about treatment



**ST VINCENT'S
HOSPITAL**
MELBOURNE

phn
NORTH WESTERN
MELBOURNE
An Australian Government Initiative

© Copyright in materials reproduced from 'The hepatitis B story' is owned by St Vincent's Hospital (Melbourne) Limited (SVHM) (2013). Reproduction of these materials without SVHM's express written permission is prohibited. Copyright in the remaining materials in this publication is owned by NWMPHN 2018 2021, with all rights reserved.

Information in plain English

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many people who have provided advice and support during the development of this resource.

Project Manager:

Gabrielle Bennett, Victorian Viral Hepatitis Educator, St Vincent's Melbourne
Email: gabrielle.bennett@svha.org.au

Project Worker:

Marg Sutherland, St Vincent's Melbourne

Advisory Group members:

Emily Adamson, *Cancer Council Victoria*

Amir Ansari, *Centre for Culture Ethnicity & Health*

Joanne Gardner, *Cohealth and Victorian Infectious Diseases Service*

Jacqui Richmond, *La Trobe University and Burnet Institute*

Garry Sattell, *Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation*

Jawid Sayed, *Hepatitis Victoria*

Written by:

Gabrielle Bennett and Marg Sutherland

Funded by:

North Western Melbourne PHN

Illustrations: Jenny Bowman Email: jenbowman@netspace.net.au

Graphic design: Ray Hehr, Swivel Design Email: info@swivel-design.com.au

Thanks also to:

- Community members who attended focus groups and provided feedback on the first draft
- Staff at IPC Health and Farnham St Neighbourhood Learning Centre who provided invaluable assistance with organising the focus groups
- Workers and community members from the Victorian Aboriginal community who provided insights and suggestions for improving the resource
- Other health and community workers who shared their expertise and support

This resource is available online and in other languages at:

www.svhm.org.au/health-professionals/specialist-clinics/g/gastroenterology/resources

What is in this book?

This is a book about hepatitis C. You will find out what hepatitis C is, how you get it, and about tests and treatment. You can read about how to look after you and your family. An important message for everyone is that treatment for hepatitis C has changed. Now we can cure hepatitis C with new tablet treatments that are easy to take and work really well.

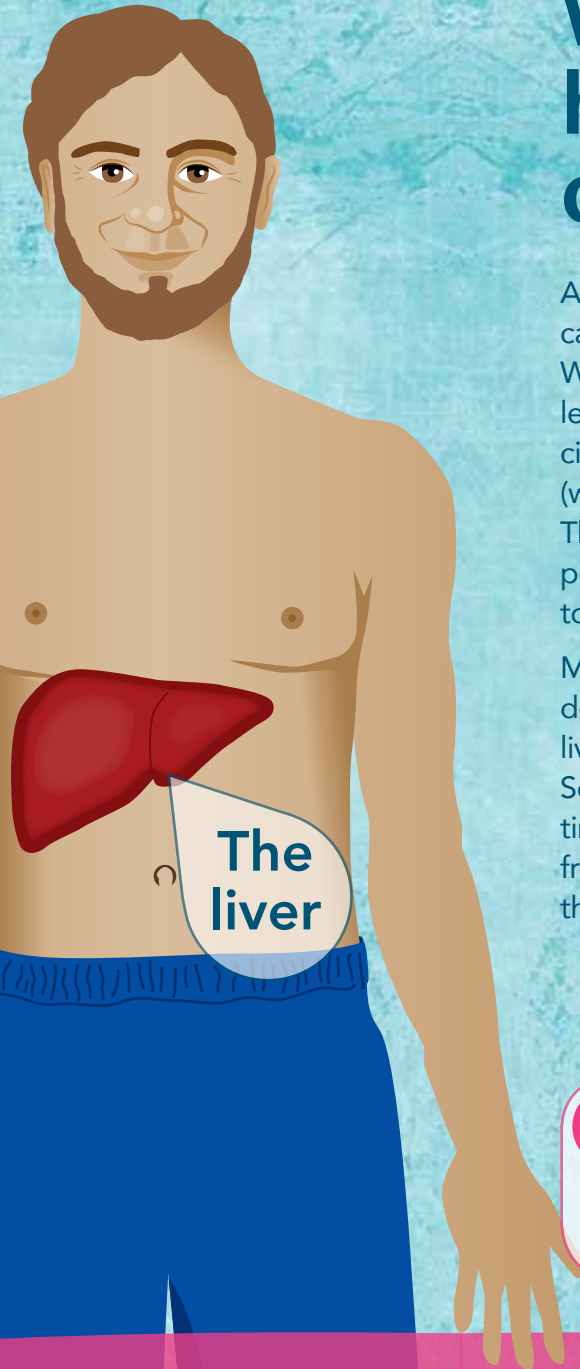
Contents

The liver and hepatitis C	1
What does hepatitis C do to you?	2
Who has hepatitis C?	4
How do you get hepatitis C?	5
Tests for hepatitis C	9
Treatment for hepatitis C	11
Life after treatment	14
Looking after your liver	15
Caring for you and your family: <i>Stopping hepatitis C</i>	17
Test. Cure. Live.	18
More help and information	19

The liver and hepatitis C

The liver is the largest organ inside the body. It is very important for good health.

Hepatitis C – or ‘hep C’ – is a virus that is too small to see but it can cause serious problems in the liver. Hepatitis C is a different virus to hepatitis A and hepatitis B which also affect the liver. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C but we can cure it with treatment that kills the virus.



The liver



Your liver helps keeps you healthy. Hepatitis C can cause problems with your liver.

What does hepatitis C do to you?

After many years hepatitis C can cause big problems with your liver. Without treatment hepatitis C can lead to serious liver scarring (called cirrhosis), liver cancer, or liver failure (where the liver stops working). These liver problems make people very sick and can lead to an early death.

Most people with hepatitis C do not feel sick until their liver has a lot of damage. Some people feel sick, tired, have pain or fever from the time they get the virus.



Many people do not know they have hepatitis C. You can feel well but your liver might not be okay.



Who has hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is in all parts of the world and affects people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures. Many countries have large numbers of people who have hepatitis C.

Some people who have hepatitis C were born in Australia. Others were not born here but live here now. Some communities in Australia have higher rates of hepatitis C, including Aboriginal communities.

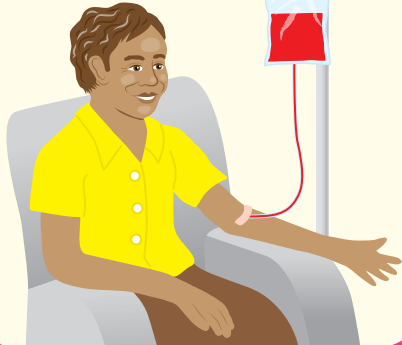
! There are people from all parts of the world living with hepatitis C.

How do you get hepatitis C?

The hepatitis C virus is passed on in blood. You can get hepatitis C from someone else who has hepatitis C if their blood gets into your blood. Often the amount of blood is so small you cannot see it.

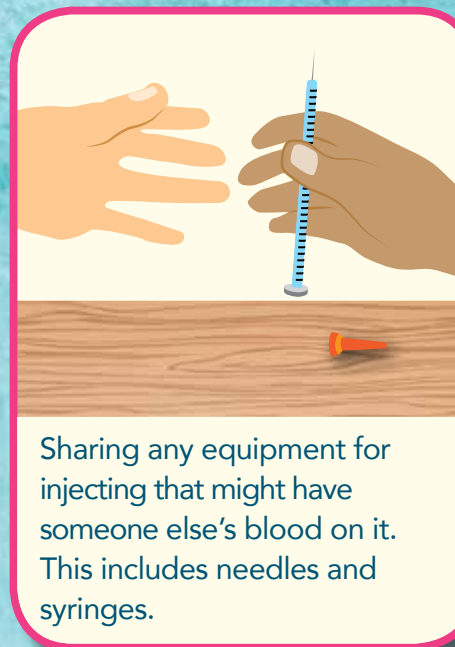
Hepatitis C can be passed on to you if your blood mixes with someone else's blood in the following ways:

A blood transfusion that was not tested for hepatitis C.

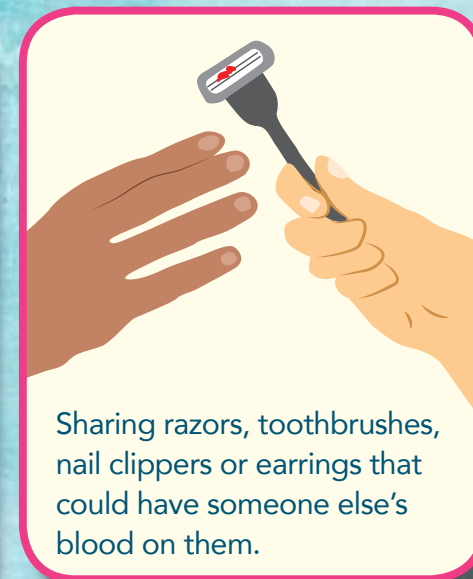


Injections, operations and blood transfusions are now safe in Australia.

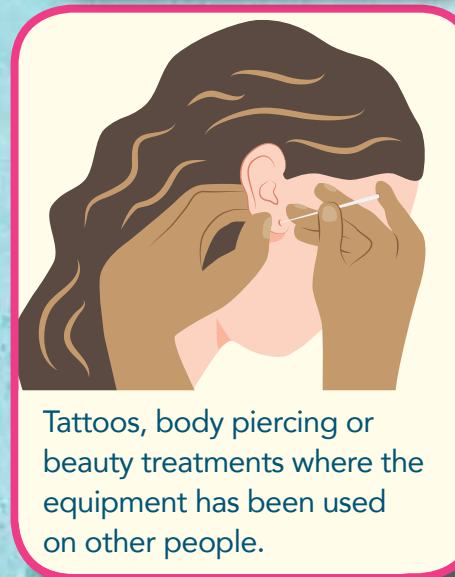
Our doctors, nurses, dentists and health centres are careful about not passing it on. In some other countries hepatitis C is passed on in health centres.



Sharing any equipment for injecting that might have someone else's blood on it. This includes needles and syringes.



Sharing razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers or earrings that could have someone else's blood on them.



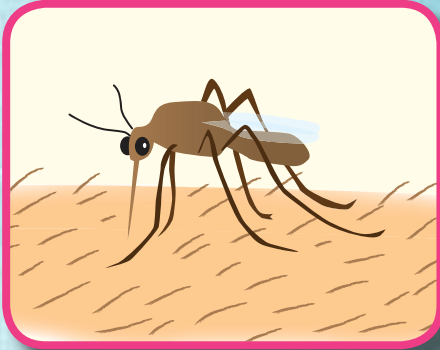
Tattoos, body piercing or beauty treatments where the equipment has been used on other people.



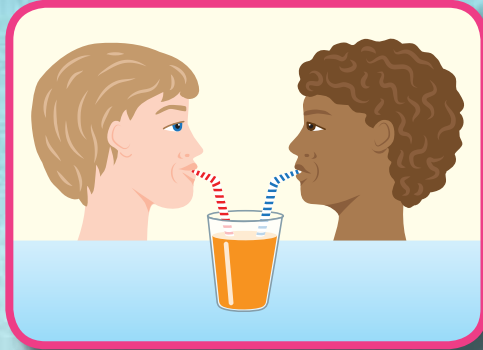
Usually a mother with hepatitis C will not pass it on when her baby is born. But the baby should have a test to check at 18 months of age.

What's safe?

You **DO NOT** get hepatitis C from:



Mosquitoes



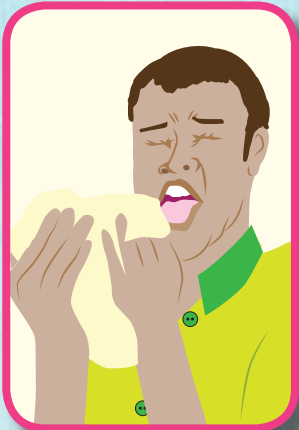
Sharing food, drinks and cigarettes



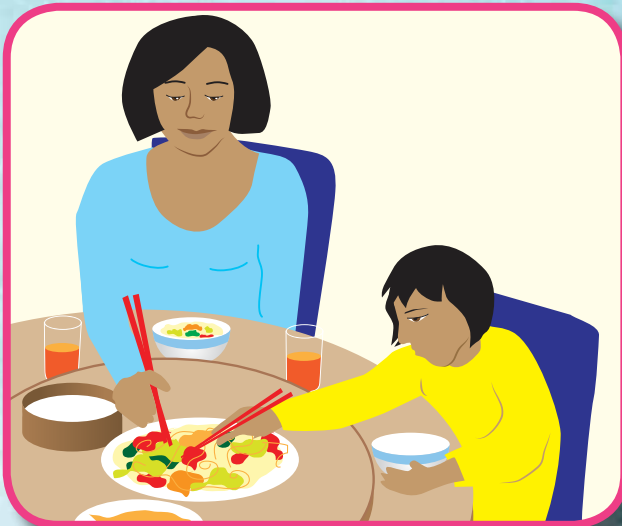
Touching, kissing, or hugging



Breastfeeding



Coughing or sneezing



Sharing plates, cups, forks, spoons or chopsticks



Usually you cannot get hepatitis C through sexual contact. There is a very low chance of getting hepatitis C from a sexual partner if they have hepatitis C and their blood gets into your blood during sexual contact.

! Hepatitis C is only passed on in blood. You can get hepatitis C from someone else who has hepatitis C if their blood gets into your blood.

Tests for hepatitis C

The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to have a hepatitis C blood test. You can ask your doctor or nurse for the test which will show:

If you have hepatitis C now

or

If you had hepatitis C in the past but you don't have it now

or

If you have never had hepatitis C.



When you talk with your doctor or nurse:

- Your information is private. Australian law says that health workers cannot discuss your information with friends, family or community members.
- You do not have to tell them why you want the test.

If you are worried ask for a hepatitis C blood test. This is the first step. If you have hepatitis C the next step is to talk with your doctor or nurse about treatment and cure.

! The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to have a hepatitis C blood test.

Finding out you have hepatitis C

Some people with hepatitis C want to tell friends and family. Others don't want to talk about it. You might have feelings like shame, worry or anger. It can help to talk to people who understand and care about you. This might be a health worker, social worker, family

member or friend. Take time to decide who you want to tell.

There are laws in Australia to protect people's health information. Usually you don't have to tell anyone you have hepatitis C. People with hepatitis C have the right to the same respect as everyone else.



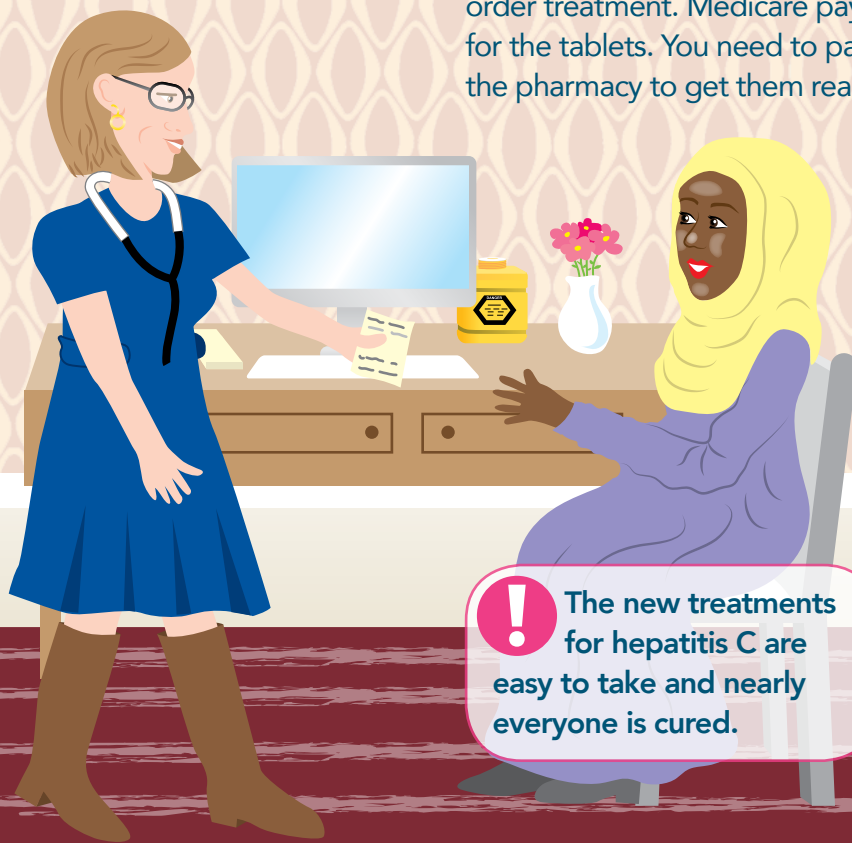
Treatment for hepatitis C

When you get hepatitis C your body tries to kill the virus. Most people are not able to kill the virus themselves. They need treatment to do it for them.

If you have hepatitis C for many years and don't have treatment you can get serious health problems.

Treatments for hepatitis C are much better now. They are safe and easy to take. Most people need to take tablets for 8 to 12 weeks. Nearly everyone who gets treated is cured. This means the virus is dead and has gone from your body.

Your doctor or nurse can usually order treatment. Medicare pays for the tablets. You need to pay the pharmacy to get them ready.



! The new treatments for hepatitis C are easy to take and nearly everyone is cured.

Other things to know about treatment

Before you start the tablets you will need to have tests to check for liver damage. You will need blood tests and you might need a special scan called a Fibroscan. Some people with liver problems need to see a special hepatitis doctor.

You need another blood test 3 months after treatment is finished to check that the virus is gone and that you are cured.



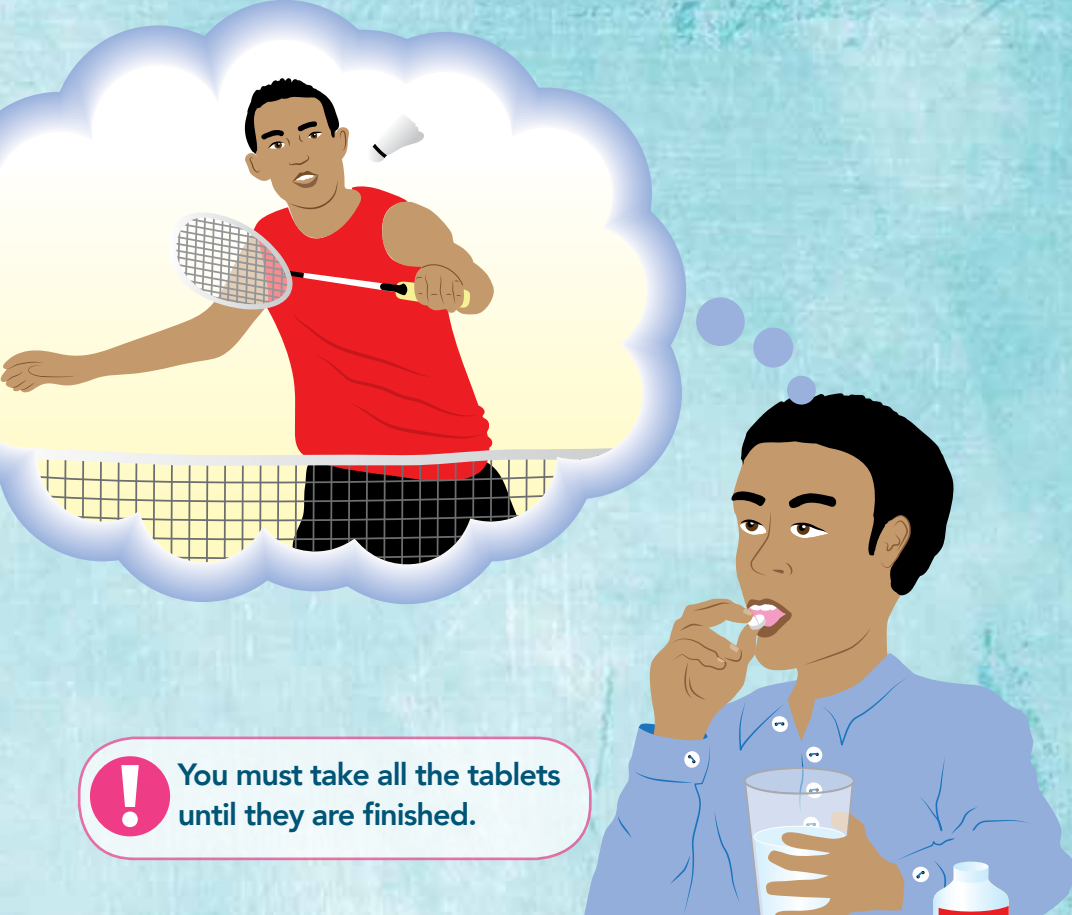
Blood Test



Fibroscan

Taking the tablets

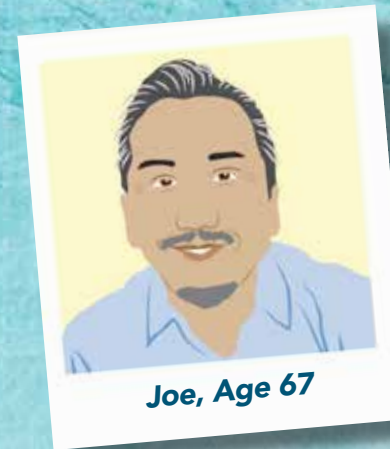
You need to take the tablets every day so they kill the hepatitis C virus. Take all the tablets until they are finished – even if you start to feel better. If you stop taking the treatment it might not work.



! You must take all the tablets until they are finished.

People who have been cured say they are happy because they feel much better and they don't worry about hepatitis C anymore. They can do things they enjoy, like being with family and friends.

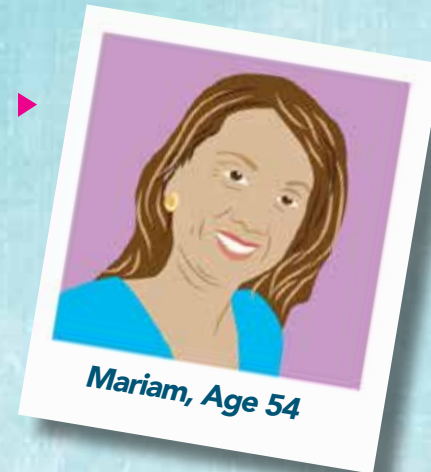
Life after treatment



Joe, Age 67

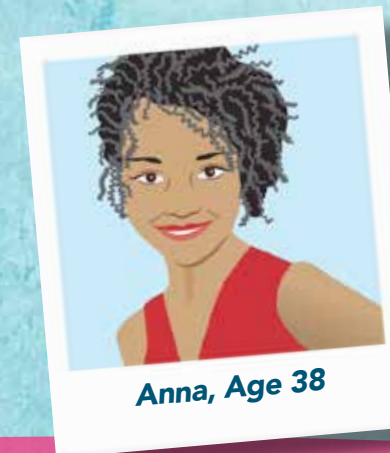
“ My doctor said there was something wrong with my liver. I was tired all the time. I tried the new treatments. Now my liver is better and I have much more energy. I'm gardening again, which I love. ”

“ When we were young we had our ears pierced. They used the same needle on all of us and I got hepatitis C. I worried my children would get it from my blood but they are OK. The old treatment was so bad and it didn't work for me. The new treatment was much better. I'm cured and I feel great! ”



Mariam, Age 54

“ They think I got hepatitis C from a blood transfusion before I came to Australia. It wasn't tested for hepatitis C. The new treatment went for 3 months. Just 1 tablet a day. Very easy. I'm cured and I don't worry about my family going to hospital because Australian hospitals use new, clean equipment. ”



Anna, Age 38

Looking after your liver

You can help to keep your liver healthy:

- Try not to drink alcohol if you have liver problems.
- Eat lots of fruit, vegetables, grains and nuts.
- Try not to eat food that has a lot of fat.
- Have only small amounts of junk food, chips, sweet food or sugary drinks.
- Stop smoking - it's bad for your liver.
- Keep a healthy body weight
- Exercise and keep active.
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about vaccinations for other types of hepatitis.



Caring for you and your family: *Stopping hepatitis C*

Curing hepatitis C means the virus is gone but treatment does not protect you from getting it again. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

Remember you can get hepatitis C from someone else who has it if their blood mixes with your blood.

Protect you and your family



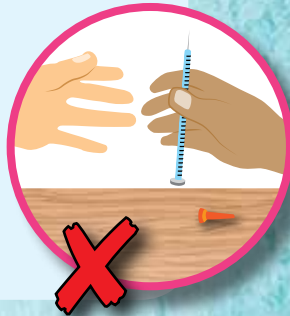
Avoid other people's blood. It might have hepatitis C.



Clean up blood, cover open cuts and sores.



Do not share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers or earrings.



Avoid sharing needles or other things used for tattoos, piercing or injecting.

! You can protect yourself from getting hepatitis C by avoiding other people's blood.

Test. Cure. Live.

If you or someone close to you could have hepatitis C ask your doctor or nurse for a hepatitis C test. Treatments for hepatitis C have changed and are much better now. Treatment can cure you of hepatitis C so you and your family can enjoy life together doing the things you love.



More help and information

Your clinic or health centre

Your doctor, GP or clinic nurse

Hepatitis Victoria

Email: admin@hepvic.org.au
www.hepvic.org.au

Hepatitis Australia

National Hepatitis Infoline
Phone: 1800 437 222
www.hepatitisaustralia.com

Multicultural Health and Support Service (MHSS)

Working with communities to prevent viral hepatitis.

Phone: 9418 9929
www.ceh.org.au

All good

Information about hepatitis C in 17 languages
www.allgood.org.au/languages

Direct Line

Information on needle syringe services, drug and alcohol counselling
Phone: 1800 888 236
www.directline.org.au

Harm Reduction Victoria

Information and support promoting safer drug use
www.hrvic.org.au

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)

Find your local Aboriginal health service:
www.vaccho.org.au

Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)

Phone: Fitzroy 9419 3000
Preston 9403 3300
www.vahs.org.au

Cancer Council Helpline

Interpreters available
Phone: 13 11 20

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)



Phone: 131 450
(free for doctors)

