

SYMPTOMS

Hepatitis C infection is a viral-based condition often transmitted through blood and its products, commonly amongst intravenous drug abusers (IVDU). Similarly to Hepatitis B, acute infection may be asymptomatic, however the following may present between 2 to 24 weeks post-exposure ^[1]:

- Fever and fatigue
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Joint pain
- Dark urine
- Pale stools
- Yellowing of skin and sclera

The above are mainly due to liver inflammation, which can become chronic leading to more severe complications, like cirrhosis or cancer ^[2].



TRANSMISSION

Distribution and Spread

As mentioned, HCV is mainly transmitted via a bloodborne route, most commonly amongst IVDUs due to sharing of needles amongst infected persons ^[3]. Such spread may also occur with needlestick injuries in healthcare, or otherwise due to transfusion of infected blood and products (although rare due to testing). Note that HCV can also be spread through sexual contact, commonly between men who have sex with men, and from mother to child during birth. Infection cannot spread through casual contact, including kissing and sharing of food/drinks ^[1].

RECOMMENDATION

Treatment

Direct Acting Antivirals (DAA) are the mainstay treatment, recommended for chronic and acute infection, except for pregnant women and children younger than 3 ^[2]. Over 90% of chronically infected persons can be cured, regardless of genotype, with 8–12 weeks of therapy. ^[2].

Prevention

There is no vaccine available against HCV. Prevention is mainly through screening and cautionary measures, including ^[1]:

- Handling and disposal of needles and sharps safely
- Offering free needles and full harm-reduction services to IVDUs
- Practicing protected sex, avoiding blood exposure during sex
- Avoiding sharing of razors and blood-stained objects

1. Hepatitis C [Internet]. World Health Organization: WHO. 2018. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-c> (accessed March 23, 2023).
2. Hepatitis C Questions and Answers for Health Professionals [Internet]. CDC. 2019. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/hcvfaq.htm> (accessed March 23, 2023).
3. Facts about hepatitis C [Internet]. ECDC. 2019. Available from: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/hepatitis-c/facts> (accessed March 23, 2023).