

Hepatitis C Infection

(Acute and Chronic)*



Clinical Description

Hepatitis C is a serious disease of the liver that results from infection with the hepatitis C virus. Clinical symptoms include vomiting, nausea, unexpected weight loss, dark urine, pale stool, fatigue, abdominal pain, and jaundice. Initial infection may be without symptoms (in more than 80% of cases) or mild; a high percentage (50-80%) of infected persons will develop chronic infection. Chronic infection can last a lifetime with no visible symptoms. About 50% of chronically infected persons develop cirrhosis or cancer of the liver.

Incubation Period

The incubation period ranges from 2 weeks - 6 months, most commonly being about 6 - 9 weeks. Hepatitis C infection may resolve without treatment in a small percentage of cases, usually within 6 months time. Persistent infection results in chronic hepatitis C infections, chronic infections may persist asymptotically for up to 20 years before onset of cirrhosis or cancer of the liver.

Mode of Transmission

Hepatitis C is usually transmitted when blood from an infected person, comes in direct contact with a susceptible person's mucous membranes, broken skin, or through contact with a contaminated sharp object. It may also be transmitted through sexual contact, and through the sharing of razors, toothbrushes, and contaminated needles.

Period of Communicability

A person infected with hepatitis C is contagious one or more weeks before the onset of symptoms and remains infectious for life unless the virus clears.

Exclusion/Reporting

There are no specific exclusion provisions in Indiana communicable disease laws or rules for hepatitis C. For other information on laws and rules regarding hepatitis C see Rule 410 IAC 1-2.3 Sec. 74 at: [http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/comm_dis_rule\(1\).pdf](http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/comm_dis_rule(1).pdf).

Prevention/Care

- Recommend hepatitis A and B vaccines for all hepatitis C infected persons.
- Don't share injection needles or lancets, toothbrushes or other items contaminated with blood. Avoid getting tattoos from non-licensed facilities.
- Universal precautions to prevent exposure to blood and body fluids should be practiced. Equipment contaminated with blood or other potentially infectious body fluids (or both) should be appropriately disinfected or sterilized prior to reuse (see Rule 410 IAC 1-2.3-73(3)).

Outbreaks

According to the ISDH Communicable Disease Reporting Rule (410 IAC 1-2.3-37), an outbreak is defined as the number of cases of disease occurring in a community, region, or particular population that exceeds what is normally expected. If an outbreak is suspected, contact your local health department.

Other Resources

Indiana State Department of Health Quick Facts:

http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/2012QuickFact_HCV.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/Hepatitis/ChooseC.htm>

*Acute infections are required to be investigated under the Communicable Disease Rule; it is strongly recommended that chronic infections be investigated as well.