IF YOU USE OR INJECT STREET DRUGS:

- Stop and get into a drug treatment program.
- If you cannot stop, never reuse or share drugs, syringes, cookers, cotton, water, or rinse cups.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

IF YOU ARE HAVING SEX, BUT NOT WITH ONE STEADY PARTNER:

- You and your partners can get diseases spread by having sex (e.g., AIDS, hepatitis B, gonorrhea or chlamydia).
- Use latex condoms. The efficacy of latex condoms in preventing infection with HCV is unknown, but their proper use might reduce transmission.
- The surest way to prevent the spread of any disease by sex is not to have sex at all.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis B.

HOW COULD I HAVE GOTTEN HEPATITIS C?

HCV is spread primarily by exposure to human blood. You may have gotten hepatitis C if:

- you ever injected street drugs, even if you experimented a few times many years ago.
- you were treated for clotting problems with a blood product made before 1987.
- you received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant (e.g., kidney, liver, heart) from an infected donor.
- you were ever on long-term kidney dialysis.
- you were ever a health care worker and had frequent contact with blood in the work place, especially accidental needlesticks.
- your mother had hepatitis C at the time she gave birth to you.
- you ever had sex with a person infected with HCV.
- you lived with someone who was infected with HCV and shared items such as razors or toothbrushes that might have had blood on them.

A person who has hepatitis C can still get other types of viral hepatitis, such as hepatitis A or hepatitis B.

Persons depicted in these materials are models and used for illustrative purposes only.

FOR INFORMATION ON VIRAL HEPATITIS:

access our website at:
http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

or call the
Hepatitis Information Line at
1.888.4HEPCDC
1.888.443.7232

or write
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Division of Viral Hepatitis, Mailstop G37
Atlanta, GA 30333

or
contact your state or local health department

or visit
http://www.health.state.ny.us

HEPATITIS C
www.cdc.gov/hepatitis
1-888-4HEP-CDC

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
& HUMAN SERVICES

CDC
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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George E. Pataki, Governor
Department of Health
Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr.P.H., Commissioner
9339 7/04

LIVING WITH CHRONIC HEPATITIS C

ALMOST 4 MILLION AMERICANS HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH HEPATITIS C VIRUS

This information will help you better understand what hepatitis C is, how you may have gotten it, and what you can do to prevent passing it to others.

WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV), which is found in the blood of persons who have this disease. The infection is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person.

HOW SERIOUS IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is serious for some persons, but not for others. Most persons who get hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of these persons have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some persons with liver damage due to hepatitis C may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure, which may take many years to develop. Others have no long-term effects.

WHAT CAN I DO NOW THAT MY HEPATITIS C TEST IS POSITIVE?

Contact your doctor. Additional tests may be needed to check your diagnosis and to see if you have liver damage.

WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL SICK?

Many persons with chronic (long-term) hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well, but should still see their doctor. For some persons, the most common symptom is extreme tiredness.

HOW CAN I TAKE CARE OF MY LIVER?

- See your doctor regularly.
- Do not drink alcohol.
- Tell your doctor about all medicines that you are taking, even over-the-counter and herbal medicines.
- If you have liver damage from hepatitis C, you should get vaccinated against hepatitis A.

IS THERE TREATMENT FOR HEPATITIS C?

Drugs are licensed for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis C. Combination drug therapy, using pegylated interferon and ribavirin, can get rid of the virus in up to 5 out of 10 persons with genotype 1, the most common genotype in the U.S. and 8 out of 10 persons with genotype 2 or 3. You should check with your doctor to see if treatment might help you.

WHAT IF I AM PREGNANT?

About five out of every 100 infants born to HCV infected women become infected. This occurs at the time of birth, and there is no treatment that can prevent this from happening. However, infants infected with HCV at the time of birth seem to do very well in the first few years of life. More studies are needed to find out if these infants will have problems from the infection as they grow older.

Persons should not be excluded from work, school, play, child-care, or other settings on the basis of their HCV infection status.

HEPATITIS C IS NOT SPREAD BY:

- breast feeding
- hugging or kissing
- food or water
- sneezing
- coughing
- casual contact
- sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses

HOW CAN I PREVENT SPREADING HCV TO OTHERS?

- Do not donate your blood, body organs, other tissue, or sperm.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles that might have your blood on them.
- Cover your cuts and open sores.
- If you have one long-term steady sex partner, you do not need to change your sexual practices. There is a very low chance of giving hepatitis C to that partner through sexual activity. If you want to lower the small chance of spreading HCV to your sex partner, you may decide to use barrier precautions such as latex condoms. Ask your doctor about having your sex partner tested.

There is no vaccine available to prevent hepatitis C.