

## **Hepatitis C, patient information and rules of conduct**

County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet.

### **Why have I received this information?**

A blood test has shown that you have hepatitis C. This leaflet contains information about hepatitis C, and what anyone with hepatitis C needs to keep in mind.

### **What is hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is a virus that infects the liver, although in the early stages of the disease, most people do not experience any symptoms. The infection can disappear on its own, but most people suffer a chronic, lifelong infection. If left untreated for many years, hepatitis C can cause liver damage. Today, there is a simple treatment that cures hepatitis C, so it is important that you have contact with a doctor and a nurse to help you with your hepatitis C treatment. Successful treatment will leave you free of infection and reduce the risk of liver damage.

Appointments with doctors and any treatment are free of charge.

A cured hepatitis C infection does not provide protection against re-infection.

There is no vaccine against hepatitis C.

### **How is hepatitis C transmitted?**

Hepatitis C is transmitted by infected blood. It can be spread when drug users share syringes, mixing cups or other drug paraphernalia. In rare cases, the infection can be spread by infected blood coming into contact with broken skin or mucous membranes. In Sweden, there was a risk of infection from blood and blood products prior to 1992. Since then, all blood products in Sweden are screened for hepatitis C, which means that the risk of infection is very small, although this is not the case in other parts of the world.

The risk of infection from vaginal sex is extremely small. There is a greater risk of infection from sexual practices that can result in bleeding or damaged mucous membranes, such as anal sex. It is important that you use a condom when having sex with a casual partner or when there is a risk of bleeding or damage to mucous membranes.

Hepatitis C is not transmitted by hugs, kisses or tears. Infection cannot be spread by faeces, urine, vomit or nasal mucus that are not mixed with blood. Nor is there a risk of infection from blood coming into contact with unbroken skin.

### **Work**

A hepatitis C infection does not normally limit you in your work or studies.

### **Pregnancy**

The risk of a pregnant woman infecting their child is low (less than five per cent).

Accordingly, hepatitis C does not prevent you from getting pregnant or breastfeeding. If you are able to plan ahead, it is better to get treated and to cure the infection before getting pregnant.

### **Contact tracing – what does this mean?**

It is important to find anyone else who may be infected and who may spread the infection to others. Accordingly, contacts need to be traced, which means that you must inform the person responsible for tracing your contacts of anyone who may have infected you or whom you may have infected. Your identity will not be disclosed to the people that you name.

You have an obligation to participate in contact tracing.

## **Hygiene advice that should be followed to avoid infecting others**

- Be sure to cover all wounds with plasters or dressings.
- If someone helps you to change a plaster/dressing, they must wear plastic gloves.
- Any blood-stained material must be carefully packaged before being discarded.
- If you get blood on your clothes, they can be washed in a washing machine.
- Drops of blood on, for example, flooring can be wiped up with single-use materials that can be disposed of. The area should then be thoroughly cleaned with water and detergent.

## **Rules of conduct that you must be followed to avoid infecting others**

- You must attend follow-up appointments when your doctor contacts you.
- You must inform dental care and healthcare personnel that you have a blood-borne virus (BBV) when seeking dental or medical care that could result in personnel coming into contact with your blood (e.g. when providing samples or undergoing surgery).
- If you inject drugs, you must have your own syringes and needles, and not let anyone else use them. Nor are you to use shared mixing cups or other drug paraphernalia. Your drug paraphernalia must be stored so as not to pose a risk of infection to others.
- If you use syringes/needles/other medical sharps, you must not allow others to use them.
- You must inform personnel that you have a blood-borne virus if you plan on getting a tattoo, a piercing (including ears), or any other treatment that may cause your skin to bleed.
- If your blood should come into contact with a wound on another person's skin, or with their eyes, nose or mouth, you must inform them that your blood is infected with hepatitis C. Urge them to immediately rinse the area with water. They should contact their local healthcare centre, the nearest infection clinic or 1177 Vårdguiden for further advice, as soon as possible.
- Do not share razors or toothbrushes with others.
- You are not permitted to donate blood, sperm or eggs. Organ and tissue donations for transplantation may be permitted in certain situations.
- If there is a risk of bleeding and/or damage to mucous membranes during sex/other intimate contact, you must inform your partner that you have hepatitis C. This applies even if you plan to use a condom.
- If there is a risk of bleeding and/or damage to mucous membranes during sex with penile penetration of the vagina, rectum or mouth, a condom must be used throughout the entire duration of the act.

Hepatitis C is a notifiable disease that is classed as a danger to public health, as defined by the Communicable Diseases Act. Accordingly, you have an obligation to follow the rules of conduct that your doctor issues to you. You can request that the County Medical Officer for your region reviews the rules of conduct. However, until such a review has been completed, you must continue to follow the rules issued to you.

## **Would you like to learn more?**

You can find more information about hepatitis C at:

[www.1177.se](http://www.1177.se)

[www.umo.se](http://www.umo.se)

[www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se](http://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se)