



# Hepatitis C

## Definition:

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV).

- Acute hepatitis C is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Acute infection can lead to chronic infection.
- Chronic hepatitis C is a lifelong illness that occurs when HCV remains in a person's blood for longer than 6 months and causes inflammation of the liver. Over time this can cause cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death.
- Both acute and chronic HCV can be cured. Getting tested for hepatitis C is important to find out if you are infected and get lifesaving treatment. Treatments are available that can cure most people with hepatitis C in 8 to 12 weeks.

## Signs and symptoms:

Signs and symptoms of hepatitis C include fatigue, lack of appetite, dark urine, fever, jaundice, abdominal pain, and vomiting. Many people with HCV do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected.

## Transmission:

Hepatitis C virus is spread by contact with infectious blood, primarily through sharing of contaminated needles syringes, or other injection drug using equipment. Hepatitis C virus can also be spread through use of contaminated tattooing and body piercing equipment. It is less commonly transmitted by sexual contact. HCV can also be passed from an infected mother to her unborn child.

## Diagnosis:

Hepatitis C is diagnosed by a series of blood tests.

## Role of the School Nurse:

### Prevention

- Currently there is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.
- Educate children of what to do when there is blood in the classroom and/or on the playground.
- Standard precautions should be used for all students and staff in the school setting
- Educate age appropriate individuals on precautions for tattooing and body piercing

### Treatment Recommendations

- If acute infection is suspected, the student should be referred immediately to his or her primary care provider or local emergency department for further evaluation.

## Exclusions

No exclusions are indicated for students or staff with hepatitis C. Standard precautions should be used for all students and staff.

## Reporting Requirements

Hepatitis C is a reportable condition and should be reported to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

## Resources:

- Maine CDC Hepatitis website (including fact sheet)  
<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/hepatitis/index.shtml>
- Federal CDC Hepatitis website <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>