

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) and California Health Care Workers (HCWs)

Is routine testing of HCWs for hepatitis C recommended?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend routine testing of healthcare workers (HCWs) for hepatitis C infection unless they have a known exposure to the hepatitis C virus (HCV).¹ For more information on groups otherwise recommended for HCV testing see: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/Documents/HepatitisBandCScreeningToolkitforPrimaryCare.pdf>.

I just had a needlestick, or other occupational exposure to blood, what should I do?

If you experienced a needlestick or sharps injury or were exposed to blood or body fluid of a patient in the course of your work, immediately follow these steps²:

- Wash needlesticks and cuts with soap and water
- Flush splashes to the nose, mouth, or skin with water
- Irrigate eyes with clean water, saline, or sterile irrigants
- Report the incident to your supervisor
- Seek prompt counseling with your Employee/ Occupational Health Service
- Medical providers with questions about appropriate medical treatment for occupational exposures may contact the Clinicians' Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) Line at (888) 448-4911.

HCV antibody and HCV ribonucleic acid (RNA) test are recommended after exposure. Pre-exposure or post-exposure prophylaxis with antiviral therapy is not recommended. Infected persons should be linked to care with a hepatitis C–experienced provider.³ The employee's supervisor should report this event on a Sharps Injury Log form.⁴

What is the risk for hepatitis C infection from a needlestick exposure to HCV contaminated blood?

After a needlestick or sharps exposure to HCV positive blood, about 2 percent of those exposed will develop hepatitis C infection.¹

How soon after exposure to hepatitis C will I know if I have been infected?

HCV can be detected within three weeks of exposure.¹ According to CDC, HCV has an incubation period of 14 to 180 days, with an average of 45 days.⁵ Following an exposure incident⁶:

- The source should be tested for hepatitis C antibody (anti-HCV)
- For the person exposed to HCV-positive blood:
 - perform baseline testing for anti-HCV and alanine aminotransferase (ALT) activity; and
 - perform follow-up testing for anti-HCV and ALT activity at four-six months. If earlier diagnosis of HCV infection is desired, HCV RNA testing may be performed at 6, 12, and 24 weeks.
- Positive anti-HCV results should be confirmed by a sensitive HCV RNA test.³

Do I have to tell my patients that I have chronic hepatitis C infection?

Routine notification of patients treated by HCWs living with chronic hepatitis C infection is not recommended in the absence of a documented exposure incident.⁶ In the event that a patient is parenterally exposed (through the skin, muscle, vein, or mucous membrane) to the body fluids of an HCV infected HCW, the patient should be notified.⁶

I am a HCW with chronic hepatitis C infection, should I get treated?

The American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) recommend treatment of HCWs with chronic hepatitis C infection.³ Treatment with antiviral medications allow hepatitis C infection to be cured in as little as 8 to 12 weeks with few side effects.

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Are there any workplace restrictions for HCWs with chronic hepatitis C infection?

There are no restrictions for HCWs with chronic hepatitis C infection. CDC does not recommend exclusion from work, school, or other settings due to hepatitis C infection.¹ As recommended for all HCWs, those who have hepatitis C infection should follow standard precautions, including appropriate hand washing, use of sterile technique and protective barriers, and care in the use of needles and other sharp instruments.¹

Do I have to tell my current or future employers if I have chronic hepatitis C infection?

In California, HCWs are not required to disclose their chronic hepatitis C infection as a prerequisite for employment. California law incorporates the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and establishes independent grounds for prohibiting discrimination against disabled persons, including those living with chronic viral hepatitis infection. California law prohibits an employer from denying employment because of a physical disability, mental disability, or a medical condition.^{7,8} In work environments that require medical screening of employees, the employer may only require the medical screening after hiring the employee, and the medical exam performed must be required of every employee in the same type of position.⁸

What can I do if I think I may have been subject to discrimination for having chronic hepatitis C in my workplace, housing, or school?

California law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, which includes hepatitis.^{7,8} Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against or denied employment or other accommodations due to past or present infection with viral hepatitis may contact the [Department of Fair Housing and Employment](http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/Complaints/ComplaintProcess.htm) via their website (<http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/Complaints/ComplaintProcess.htm>) or at (800) 884-1684 or TTY at (800) 700-2320.

Disclaimer

This document seeks to introduce the reader to federal and state policies and recommendations pertaining to HCV and HCWs. It is not intended to address all aspects of labor or disability policy or to offer legal or medical advice. Although current at the time of publication, policies and recommendations change. Federal and state policies should be consulted directly for more detailed information.

References

- 1 Hepatitis C FAQs for Health Professionals. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HCV/HCVfaq.htm>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
- 2 Emergency Needlestick Information. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/bbp/emergnedl.html>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
- 3 Hepatitis C Guidance: Recommendations for Testing, Managing, and Treating Hepatitis C. American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases website. <http://hcvguidelines.org/full-report-view>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
- 4 Occupational Safety and Health Administration. OSHA 29 CFR 1910.1030: Bloodborne Pathogens. https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadis.show_document?p_table=standards&p_id=10051. Published April 3, 2012. Accessed August 26, 2015.
- 5 The ABCs of Hepatitis. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/Resources/Professionals/PDFs/ABCTable.pdf>. Accessed September 17, 2015.
- 6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated U.S. Public Health Service Guidelines for the Management of Occupational Exposures to HBV, HCV, and HIV and Recommendations for Postexposure Prophylaxis. *MMWR*. 2001; 50(RR11): 1-46. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5011.pdf>. Accessed August 26, 2015.
- 7 California Government Code Section 12940. http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=GOV§ionNum=12940. Accessed August 26, 2015.
- 8 Fair Employment and Housing Act. California Department of Fair Employment and Housing website. <http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/res/>