

Hepatitis C: Should You Be Tested?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood borne infection in the United States; approximately 3.2 million people are chronically infected. The good news is it's entirely treatable, and Copper Queen Community Hospital has created a new program for patients living in rural communities.

The new program was introduced a few months ago, and treatment plans are being developed for each patient. This program eliminates the need for patients to travel, in part due to CQCH's Tele-Medicine program and the ability to meet with specialists who can give additional advice for our patients.

Hepatitis C virus infections can be either acute or chronic. Approximately 10 million people living in the US are infected but currently undiagnosed. Symptoms can include yellowing of the eyes, unexplained stomach pain, easy bruising, or signs of early cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver.

- Acute Hepatitis C is a short-term illness that occurs within the first six months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis C virus. Approximately 75 to 85 percent of those who become infected with Hepatitis C virus develop chronic infection.
- Chronic Hepatitis C is a long-term illness that occurs when the Hepatitis C virus remains in a person's body. Hepatitis C virus infection can last a lifetime and lead to serious liver problems, including cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer.

The following are ways people can become infected with the Hepatitis C virus

- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment (currently the most common way Hepatitis C is spread in the US)
- Needle stick injuries in healthcare settings
- Being born to a mother who has Hepatitis C.

Should you get tested?

Talk to your physician about being tested if any of the following are true:

- Born from 1945 through 1965
- A current or former injection drug user, even if you injected only one time or many years ago
- Have abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- Were treated for a blood clotting problem before 1987
- Work in healthcare or public safety and were exposed to blood through a needle stick or other sharp object injury
- On long-term hemodialysis treatment
- Are infected with HIV
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992.

When in doubt, visit your healthcare provider -- diagnosis can be made with a simple blood test. To learn more, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/c/>



Dr. Karam Makhni is a family physician, and completed his Family Medicine residency at the Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta. The Douglas Rural Health Clinic is

located at 100 East Fifth Street. For more information, visit www.cqch.org or contact the clinic at 520-364-7659.

This message is brought to you by Copper Queen Medical Associates.

