

## What should Native Americans and Alaskan Natives know about hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (HCV) is the most common chronic blood-borne viral infection in the United States. It is estimated that nearly 5 million people are infected with hepatitis C and most do not know it. Hepatitis C impacts the liver causing liver damage that most often leads to liver diseases such as cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver failure.

In 2010, liver disease was the fifth leading cause of death among Native Americans/Alaskan Natives compared to 11th among whites, or Anglo Americans. In that same year, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives had the highest hepatitis C mortality rate of any race or ethnicity, more than twice the rate in whites. Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives also have elevated rates of liver cancer and deaths from liver cancer in the United States.

## Why should Native Americans and Alaskan Natives get tested for hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C has been called the “silent epidemic” because 75% of those who are infected do not know and it can take 20 years or more for someone to have noticeable symptoms. However, by that time, severe damage to the liver may have already occurred. A simple blood test can identify if you have hepatitis C.

There is a cure for HCV. Early detection of the virus increases the chances for successful treatment, which stops further liver damage from occurring. Ask your healthcare provider about getting tested for hepatitis C at your next visit.

**Even if you feel healthy,  
you could still have  
Hepatitis C**

**Left untreated, it can  
lead to liver cancer.  
Talk to your doctor.**

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# Native Americans & HEPATITIS



**DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE.  
IT AFFECTS MILLIONS  
AND CAUSES LIVER CANCER.**

**Talk to your doctor about testing. Early detection saves lives.**

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# Liver Health

Your liver is a pretty cool organ and is often called the 'non-complaining' organ. Your liver is located on the right side of your body and acts as your body's filter. Therefore, everything you eat, drink, smell, and absorb through your skin gets processed through the liver, which means it may be frequently exposed to alcohol and various toxins. Since the liver does not complain, we often do not know when something is wrong.

**Liver disease is on the rise, and liver cancer is now the second leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide.**

There are a few culprits that put the liver at risk, one being Fatty Liver Disease, also called Nonalcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH). NASH develops when there is an excess buildup of fat in the liver. Also, you don't even have to be overweight to have a fatty liver! Cirrhosis is caused by inflammation in the liver which causes scar

## YOUR LIVER IS...

- On your right side under your ribcage
- Your largest organ without nerves
- Your body's filter system - all that you eat, drink, smell or absorb goes through your liver

tissue buildup in the liver and increases the chance of developing liver cancer. Viruses can cause liver damage, too. Among them are hepatitis A and B which are both preventable through vaccination. Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne virus in the US. Hepatitis C was unable to be tested for until 1992, and therefore it lived in blood and tissue banks for decades before it was identified. Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver disease, and most people don't know they have it. Talk with your healthcare provider about a series of liver function tests including a hepatitis C antibody test, and hepatitis A and B vaccinations to protect your liver.

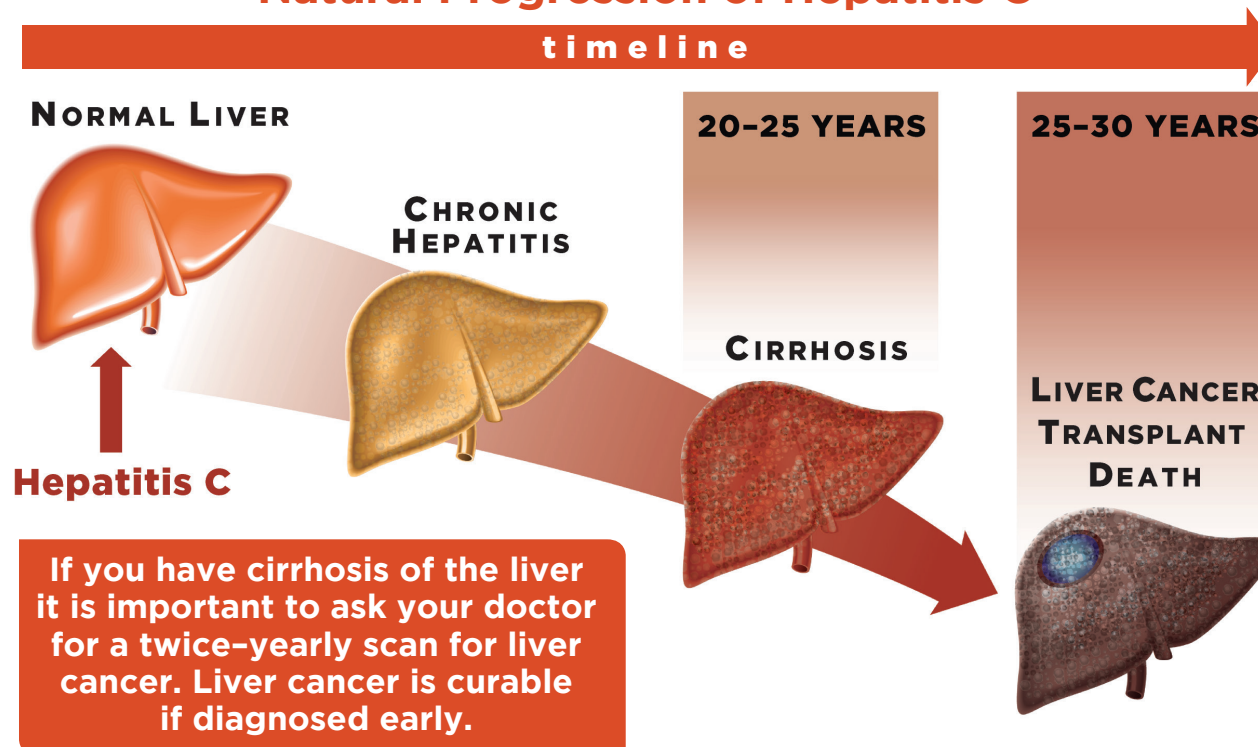


## WHAT CAN HURT YOUR LIVER?

- A diet high in fat
- Viruses like hepatitis A, B and C
- Toxins like lead-based paint, pesticides, solvents, etc.
- Alcohol, some medications (even over the counter), and some street drugs

**Always ask your healthcare provider before taking a new product to make sure it is not toxic to the liver.**

## Natural Progression of Hepatitis C



## HOW TO KEEP YOUR LIVER HEALTHY

- Reduce or eliminate your alcohol intake
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B
- Ask your healthcare professional to test you for hepatitis C antibodies
- Eat a well-balanced and lower fat diet
- Practice good sleeping habits
- Stay active and exercise regularly
- Manage your stress
- Learn and practice harm reduction — never share personal items
- Try to avoid environmental toxins
- Drink plenty of water; eight to ten 8-ounce glasses a day.