

Why should Veterans get tested for Hepatitis C?

Chronic infection with hepatitis C (HCV) is a major public health problem in both the Veterans Health Administration and the United States. Complications that result from untreated HCV infection include progressive liver damage leading to cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure, and death.

Although many of these complications are treatable or even preventable, 75% of those with hepatitis C infection in the U.S. are unaware they are infected. Nationally, among Veterans in care, HCV is a real and increasing cause of cirrhosis and liver cancer. Between 2002 and 2013, the percentage of Veterans in care with HCV and cirrhosis doubled.

The large number of Veterans identified with hepatitis C doesn't represent an upward trend in new infections, but instead reflects those who have been living with hepatitis C, potentially for decades.

Veterans at most risk of having hepatitis C are those where at least one of the following applies:

- Who are male born between 1945 and 1965
- Who were in combat, especially in Vietnam
- Who live in urban areas
- Who have comorbid alcohol or substance use disorders and psychiatric conditions
- Who have a history of homelessness

Don't live without knowing any longer. Consider getting tested today.

What should Veterans know about Hepatitis C?

A simple blood test can determine if you have hepatitis C and can prevent further liver disease. If you use the Veterans Health Administration as your primary source of healthcare since becoming a Veteran, then you may have been tested; but it is not an automatic test with other public or private healthcare providers. In either case, be sure to ask about simple hepatitis C testing options at your next visit with your provider.

Is there counseling?

It's important to get counseling when you are tested for hepatitis C. As part of the procedure in the Veterans Health Administration, counseling is provided. If your test result is positive, the provider may refer you for a liver evaluation and treatment to cure your HCV. If your result is negative, you will learn about ways to protect yourself against hepatitis C. Other public and privately funded counseling is available. Consult with your healthcare provider.

Even if you feel healthy,
you could still have

Hepatitis C

Left untreated, it can lead to
liver cancer.

Talk to your doctor.

www.CaringAmbassadors.org



Veterans & HEPATITIS



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

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

www.CaringAmbassadors.org

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.

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.

Natural Progression of Hepatitis C

