

Hepatitis C in Ethnocultural Communities in Canada

A Training Guide for Community Care,
Health, and Social Service Providers

Produced by

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Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

- ✘ First identified in 1989
- ✘ Blood-borne virus, infects liver
- ✘ 170 M people infected Worldwide
- ✘ 242,500 people infected in Canada
- ✘ 8,000 people newly infected in 2007

From 1960 to 1990 an estimated 90,000 to 160,000 Canadians contracted hepatitis C through infected blood or blood products

Prevalence

- ✘ Prevalence is 3% or higher in some of the countries from which Canada gets immigrants
 - + People's Republic of China
 - + Egypt
 - + Philippines
 - + Vietnam

- ✘ Common causes of hepatitis C transmission
 - + Cultural practices
 - ✘ Rubbing skin with coins until there is bleeding
 - + Improperly sterilized hypodermic needles

Canadian Public Awareness

- ✘ General public awareness is low
- ✘ Little has been done to educate
 - + General public
 - + People with low literacy
 - + People from diverse cultural, linguistic backgrounds
- ✘ As a result, infected individuals
 - + Are unaware they have the disease
 - + Unknowingly transmit the virus
 - + Do not take precautions to safeguard their health
 - + Do not seek treatment

Stigma

- ✘ Many cultural taboos exist
- ✘ Talking about the disease is a taboo
 - + Association with drug use and alcohol abuse
 - + Fear of being stigmatized and labeled
- ✘ Individuals experience
 - + Shame and isolation
 - + Fear being ostracized by communities
- ✘ Result
 - + Reluctant to access care, treatment or obtain knowledge
 - + Further spread of the disease

What is hepatitis?

- ✘ Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver
- ✘ If caused by a virus, it is referred to as viral hepatitis
- ✘ At least seven different viruses are known to cause hepatitis
- ✘ The most common ones in Canada are hepatitis A, B, and C

What is hepatitis C?

- ✘ Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus, a blood-borne virus
- ✘ It is spread by direct exposure to infected
 - + Blood
 - + Body fluids containing blood
- ✘ It is a major cause of chronic liver disease
- ✘ Out of every 100 people infected with hepatitis C
 - + ~75 – 80% develop chronic infection
 - + ~10 – 20% develop cirrhosis over 20 – 30 years
 - + ~1 – 5% die from the consequences of long term infections including liver cancer

Hepatitis A, B and C - Differences

Hepatitis	C	A	B
Caused by	Hepatitis C virus	Hepatitis A virus	Hepatitis B virus
Spread by	Blood, body fluids containing blood	Fecal-oral route via raw seafood, shellfish, contaminated water, ice cubes	Blood, body fluids Sexual contact Infected mother → child at birth

Common Risk Factors

- ✘ Injection drug use (past or present)
- ✘ Intranasal drug use (snorting)
- ✘ Sharing needles, straws, pipes, spoon, cookers, etc.
- ✘ Tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture
 - + using unsterile equipment, ink or techniques
- ✘ Workplace exposure via needle-stick injury
- ✘ Improperly sterilized medical, dental equipment
- ✘ Sharing personal care articles
 - + Razors, scissors, nail clippers, or tooth brushes
- ✘ Unprotected sexual activity that includes contact with blood
- ✘ Being born to a mother who has the hepatitis C virus

Can hepatitis C be prevented?

- ✘ The only effective prevention method
 - + Avoid contact with infected blood.
- ✘ Prevention
 - + Do not share needles, syringes, spoons, drug solutions, water, cookers, pipes, straws for snorting drugs, and other paraphernalia
 - + Only use fresh ink and single use, disposable needles for tattooing, body piercing, acupuncture, etc.
 - + Sterilize all equipment, including the ink
 - + Wear latex gloves if contact with another person's blood is likely
 - + Practice safer sex
 - + In non-monogamous relationships or with new sexual partners, use condoms
 - ✘ Sexual transmission rare in monogamous, long-term relationships

Can you infect family, friends?

✘ Yes!

✘ How to decrease risk

- + Do not share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, etc.
- + Cover any open wounds or sores with a bandage
- + Dispose blood-contaminated items in containers
 - ✘ Tampons, sanitary napkins, tissues, bandages, needles, etc.
- + Do not share needles, straws, or other drug paraphernalia (containers, cookers, filters, or water)
- + Do not nurse with cracked or bleeding nipples

✘ Always use condoms

- + Particularly if not in a long-term, monogamous relationship
 - ✘ Protect partners from hepatitis C
 - ✘ Reduce transmission risk of other infections (hepatitis B, HIV, etc.)

Symptoms

- ✘ Many people have no symptoms
 - + They may even feel quite healthy
- ✘ Symptoms include
 - + Fatigue
 - + Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
 - + Abdominal and joint pain
 - + Dark urine
 - + Nausea
 - + Loss of appetite

Who should be tested?

- ✘ Anyone who has done something that could put them at risk
 - + Even once or a long time ago
- ✘ Anyone with signs or symptoms of hepatitis C
 - + Nausea, fatigue, reduced appetite, jaundice, dark urine, and abdominal pain, etc.
- ✘ Anyone who was born or has resided in countries where hepatitis C is common
 - + Egypt, southern Italy, India, Pakistan, China, The Philippines, and Vietnam
 - + Particularly if exposed to blood products, medical procedures, or vaccinations in these countries

What are the tests?

- ✘ There are several tests
- ✘ Different tests help decide on the appropriate treatment
- ✘ Consult a health care provider who will request the appropriate test

- ✘ The Anti-HCV test
 - + Looks for antibodies to HCV
 - + If positive, the individual was once infected with the virus

- ✘ The HCV RNA tests
 - + Indicates whether the individual still has the virus
 - + How much of the virus is in the blood

- ✘ The HCV genotyping test
 - + Tells the type (or genotype) of HCV

- ✘ Liver function and liver enzymes tests
 - + Determine whether HCV is damaging the liver

- ✘ Liver biopsy
 - + Shows the cumulative damage done to the liver by the virus, fat and alcohol

Can you get hepatitis C again?

- ✘ Yes!
- ✘ The immune system makes antibodies to hepatitis C
- ✘ The virus changes too quickly for the immune system
- ✘ Antibodies no longer offer protection
- ✘ Therefore, no one has lifelong immunity

Is there a vaccine?

- ✘ No hepatitis C vaccine exists at this time
- ✘ Even people who have been successfully treated for HCV can be reinfected
- ✘ Individuals' actions affect their risk level for reinfection

What is the treatment?

- ✘ Effective treatment for hepatitis C is available
 - + Combination of pegylated interferon and ribavirin
- ✘ If treatment is prescribed, the individual and doctor should consider
 - + What is the current treatment for hepatitis C?
 - + How effective is the treatment?
 - + What are the side effects of the treatment?
 - + Who is a candidate for the treatment?
 - + How does someone get treatment?
- ✘ To prevent further liver damage
 - + Vaccinate against HAV and HBV
 - + Vaccines for both hepatitis A and B exist
 - + Many provinces and territories provide vaccines free of cost

Alternative Therapies?

- ✘ No alternative therapy has been proven safe and effective for treating hepatitis C
 - + Homeopathy, herbal medicine, vitamins, minerals, etc.
- ✘ Most alternative therapists are not regulated by provincial and territorial laws
- ✘ For information on risks/benefits of alternative therapies
 - + Look for a professional therapist
 - + Therapist should have a good understanding of hepatitis C

How is hepatitis C managed?

- ✘ To stay healthy and reduce stress on the liver
 - + Avoid or limit alcohol
 - + Avoid or limit tobacco
 - + Eat healthily
 - ✘ See guidelines *“Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide”*
 - + Avoid other liver damaging illnesses like hepatitis A and B
 - + Avoid “street” drugs, including marijuana
 - + Practice safer sex
 - + Be physically active
 - + Sleep adequately

Some Useful Web sites

- ✘ Canadian Liver Foundation

 - + <http://www.liver.ca>

- ✘ Government of Ontario

 - + www.hepcontario.ca

- ✘ Health Canada

 - + <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

 - + <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodnatur/index-eng.php>

- ✘ Public Health Agency of Canada

 - + <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hepc>

References Cited

- ✘ Hepatitis C – Get the Facts

- + Public Health Agency of Canada

- ✘ www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hepc/index_e.html

- ✘ Healthy Living with Hepatitis C

- + Canadian Liver Foundation

- ✘ www.liver.ca

- ✘ Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

- + Health Canada

- ✘ www.hc-gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e/html