

# Hepatitis C in North Carolina, 2022



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Public Health

**Hepatitis C is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV) and the leading cause of liver cancer and liver transplantation in the United States.** Hepatitis C is primarily spread through contact with blood from an infected person. For some persons hepatitis C is a mild short-term (acute) illness lasting a few weeks. However, for most (75-85%) persons with hepatitis C, it becomes a long-term chronic infection. Chronic hepatitis C can cause serious health problems including cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. Reinfections are possible.



An estimated **2.3%** of adults (~200,000 persons) are living with hepatitis C in North Carolina.



**4 in 10** persons with hepatitis C do not know they are infected.



Since 2019, acute HCV cases have decreased by **61%** and chronic HCV cases have decreased by **47%**.



**59%** of acute HCV cases were among persons aged 30-44 years in 2022.



**40%** of acute HCV cases reported injection drug use as risk factor.

## Hepatitis C Cases in North Carolina, 2022

- ❖ **75** persons with newly diagnosed acute HCV were reported.
- ❖ **10,044** persons with newly diagnosed chronic HCV were reported.
- ❖ **90,817** people were diagnosed with chronic HCV and presumed alive and living in NC at the end of 2022.

*Many more infections go undiagnosed and unreported.*

## Hepatitis C Transmission



Hepatitis C is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of another person.



Transmission can occur through sharing needles or "works" when injecting drugs, or through an occupational needle-stick exposure.

## Hepatitis C Causes and Symptoms



**Symptoms occur in about 20-30% of persons.** They include fever, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, jaundice and dark urine.



Symptoms typically occur **2-12 weeks** after exposure.

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## People at Highest Risk For Developing Hepatitis C



Persons born  
between  
1945-1965



Persons who use  
injection drugs or  
did so in the past



Persons with a  
history of  
incarceration



Persons with HIV or  
receiving maintenance  
hemodialysis



Babies born to  
HCV infected  
mothers

## Who should get tested for HCV?

**A blood test is the only way to know if a person has been infected with HCV.** Regular testing is recommended for persons who currently inject drugs or share needles, syringes, or other equipment used to inject drugs and for those currently on maintenance hemodialysis.

### You should get tested for hepatitis C if you:

- ▶ Are 18 years of age or older (get tested at least once in your lifetime)
- ▶ Are pregnant (get tested during each pregnancy)
- ▶ Currently inject drugs (get tested regularly)
- ▶ Have ever injected drugs, even if it was just once or many years ago
- ▶ Have HIV
- ▶ Have abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- ▶ Are on hemodialysis
- ▶ Received donated blood or organs before July 1992
- ▶ Received clotting factor concentrates before 1987
- ▶ Have been exposed to blood from a person who has hepatitis C
- ▶ Were born to a mother with hepatitis C

❖ Risk-based testing for hepatitis C is available through all local health departments at no cost.

## What are my prevention and treatment options for HCV?

**There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.** The best way to prevent hepatitis C is by avoiding behaviors that spread the disease, especially injecting drugs with non-sterile injection equipment.



**Hepatitis C is curable. Treatment can prevent future health complications.** Current treatments have minimal side effects and are highly effective in curing most people (95%) in 8 to 12 weeks. Reinfection can occur after treatment.

## Additional Resources

- The NC Division of Public Health's Viral Hepatitis Program created a regional drug user health resource guide that provides information on low cost/free clinics, housing, food pantry and community resources, hepatitis treatment providers, and syringe access programs. For more information visit: [https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/hepatitis/DrugUserHealthResourceGuide\\_08102021.pdf](https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/hepatitis/DrugUserHealthResourceGuide_08102021.pdf).
- The North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition (<http://www.nchrc.org/>) provides harm reduction materials to syringe access programs and community-based organizations to prevent transmission of hepatitis C.
- Injury and Violence Prevention Branch (NC Division of Public Health) oversees the North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative. For more information: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/north-carolina-safer-syringe-initiative>.

Data Sources: North Carolina Electronic Disease Surveillance System (NC EDSS) (data as of July 1, 2023), Surveillance for Viral Hepatitis, United States, 2000-2021 CDC reports (<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/statistics/index.htm>), CDC Hepatitis C – FAQs, statistics, data & guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>)