

HIT'M

Hepatitis Integration Training Manual

Hepatitis C Overview

Why the Liver Is Important

- Processes everything we eat, breathe, and absorb through our skin.
- Converts food into nutrients.
- Detoxifies substances that are harmful to the body.
- Stores vitamins, minerals and sugars.

The A's, B's and C's of Hepatitis

Hepatitis A	Hepatitis B	Hepatitis C
Not chronic or long term.	Chronic in 6% of cases.	Chronic in 85% of cases.
Transmitted through feces when changing diapers or having sex.	Most often transmitted sexually.	Most often transmitted via injection drug use with shared syringe.
Vaccine available.	Vaccine available.	No vaccine available. Prevention is key.

Facts About Hepatitis C Virus

2.7 million people in the U.S. are currently chronically infected.

Most people have no symptoms.

Out of 100 people who become infected approximately:

15 clear the virus without treatment.

85 develop chronic infection.

Of those, 70 develop chronic liver disease (CLD).

15 develop cirrhosis.

Of those, <3 die.

CDC website, January, 2002



HCV Transmission

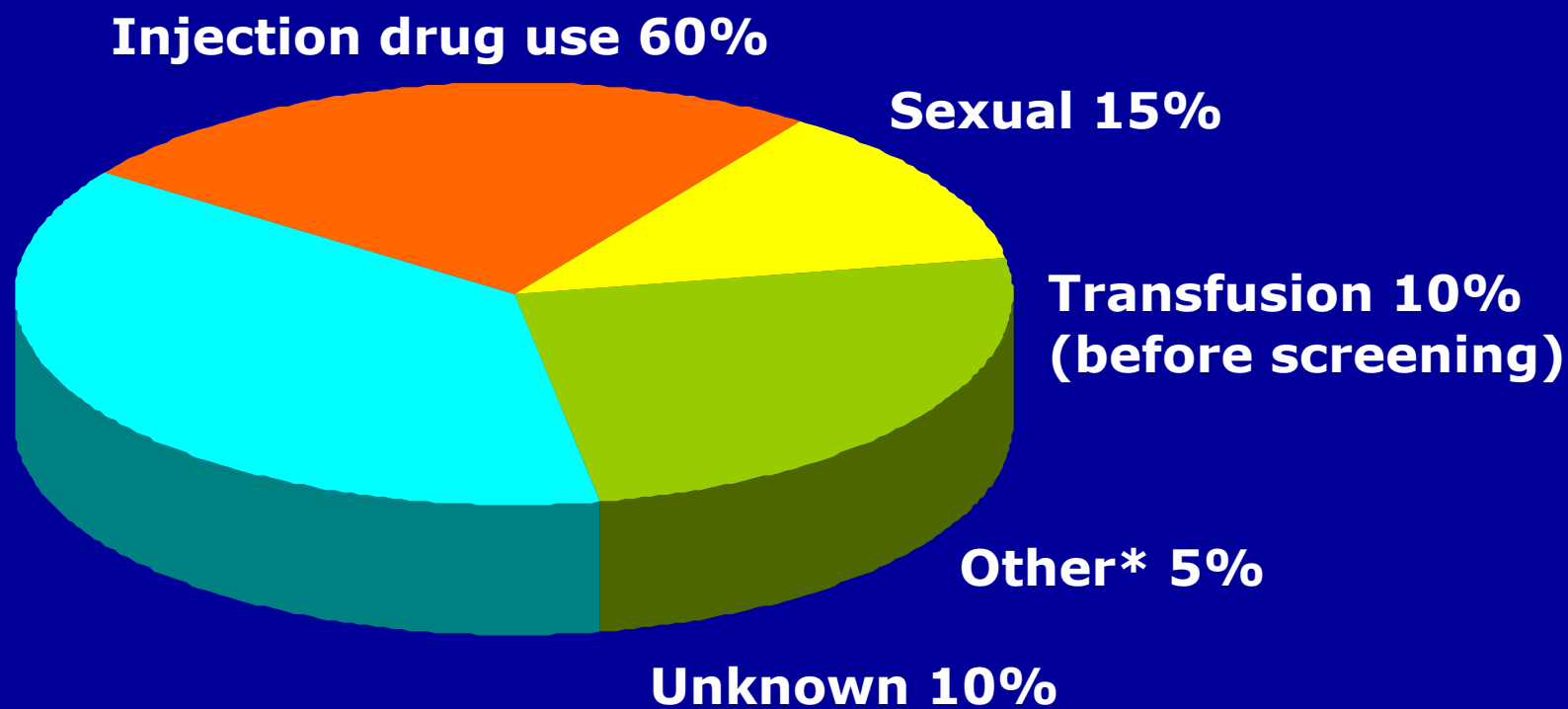
Established Risks

- Injection drug use—even once, long ago.
- Blood transfusion (before July, 1992).
- Blood making contact with cuts or broken skin.
- Kidney dialysis.

Uncertain Risks

- Unprotected sex with multiple partners.
- Unsterile tattoo or body piercing practices.
- Cocaine snorted with shared straw.
- Unprotected sex with just one long-term HCV-infected partner.
- Sharing razors or toothbrushes.

Sources of Infection for Persons with Hepatitis C



*Nosocomial; Health-care work; Perinatal

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Injection Drug Use and HCV Transmission

- HCV is easily transmitted via injection drug use — even once, long ago.
- HCV is four times more common than HIV among injection drug users (IDUs).
- 60-90% of IDUs are HCV positive after injecting for 5 years.

HCV Is NOT Spread by:

- Sneezing.
- Hugging.
- Coughing.
- Food or water.
- Breastfeeding.
- Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses.
- Casual contact.

Hepatitis C Prevention Messages (Primary)

1. Always use a new syringe if you inject drugs.
2. If you do not have a new syringe, bleach carefully.
In practice, bleach may not effectively kill HCV.
3. Don't share or re-use cookers, cotton, water, or even tourniquets (ties, belts).
4. Limit unprotected sex.

Recommended Precautions for IDUs and People with HIV

Talk to your health care provider about getting:

1. Tested for HCV.
2. Vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

Hepatitis C Prevention Messages (Secondary)

How to keep healthy if you are HCV-infected:

1. See a health care provider.
2. Be aware that alcohol can be toxic to your liver.
3. Get vaccinated against HAV and HBV.
4. Consider attending a risk reduction program or a drug treatment program.
5. Eat healthy foods, get rest, exercise, relax.
6. Get support.

How to Prevent Others from Being Infected

1. Do not share syringes, cookers, water, cotton, or ties.
2. Do not donate blood, body organs, tissue or sperm.
3. Cover cuts and sores on skin.
4. Use latex condoms and tell partners you are HCV-positive.
5. Do not share razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items.
6. Do not share straws used to sniff cocaine.

People Who Should Be Tested for HCV

Anyone who:

- Ever shared a syringe when injecting drugs — even once, long ago.
- Received a blood transfusion before July, 1992.
- Received long-term kidney dialysis.
- Has unexplained liver disease or abnormal liver tests.

Also:

- Children born to HCV-infected mothers.
- Health care workers stuck by a contaminated needle.

CDC, 1998

HCV Testing Is Not Recommended for Everyone

Although probably not at risk, consider testing if you have:

- Had a sexually transmitted disease.
- Had unprotected sex with multiple partners.
- Been tattooed with unsterile equipment (especially in prison).
- Shared straws to snort cocaine.*
- Served in Vietnam.*
- An HCV-infected long-term steady sex partner.*

* CDC does not consider these to be significant risks.

Screening and Testing for HCV

Screening Tests

- Antibody Test.
- Confirmatory Test.

If positive for HCV, assess liver damage and type of HCV:

- Viral Load Tests.
- Genotype Test.
- Liver Enzyme Tests (ALT, AST).
- Liver Biopsy.

Treatment Options

Antiviral Medications

- Pegylated interferon.
- Alpha interferon.
- Combination therapy with alpha interferon or pegylated interferon and ribavirin.

Other Treatment Considerations

- Side effects of medications include fatigue, depression, and even suicide.
- Interferon may reduce the effect of methadone.
- Support groups.

Additional Treatment Options

- Clinical Trials.
- Holistic Remedies.

HIV/HCV Co-Infection

- Up to 240,000 co-infected in the U.S., mostly IDUs.
- Hepatitis C may progress more quickly in people with HIV.
- Hepatitis C treatment more difficult.
- More research is needed.
- Co-infected people should:
 1. Ask their health care provider about being vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.
 2. Receive care from a specialist in both.
 3. Do everything possible to slow the progression of liver damage.

Summary

- No vaccine for hepatitis C.
- Hepatitis C is difficult to treat.
- Most people have no symptoms.
- Highly infectious via injection drug use with a contaminated syringe — even once, long ago.
- Prevention is key to limiting the spread of hepatitis C.