



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

# All about hepatitis

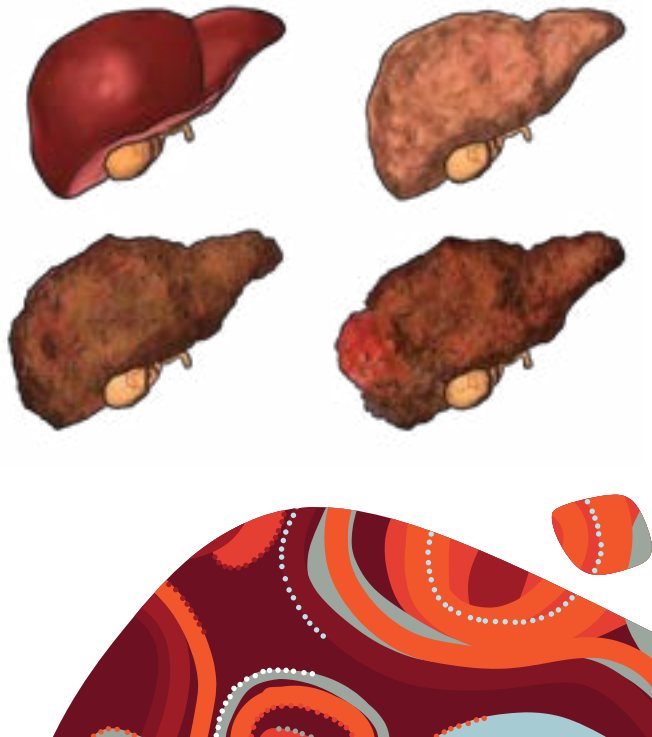


## What is hepatitis?

- Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Your liver keeps you strong and healthy by cleaning your blood. Once it is badly damaged, you can't fix your liver, and you can even die.

Hepatitis can be caused by:

- viruses (such as hepatitis A, hepatitis B or hepatitis C)
- drinking too much grog or taking drugs
- obesity, diabetes and other metabolic illnesses
- reactions to some chemicals.

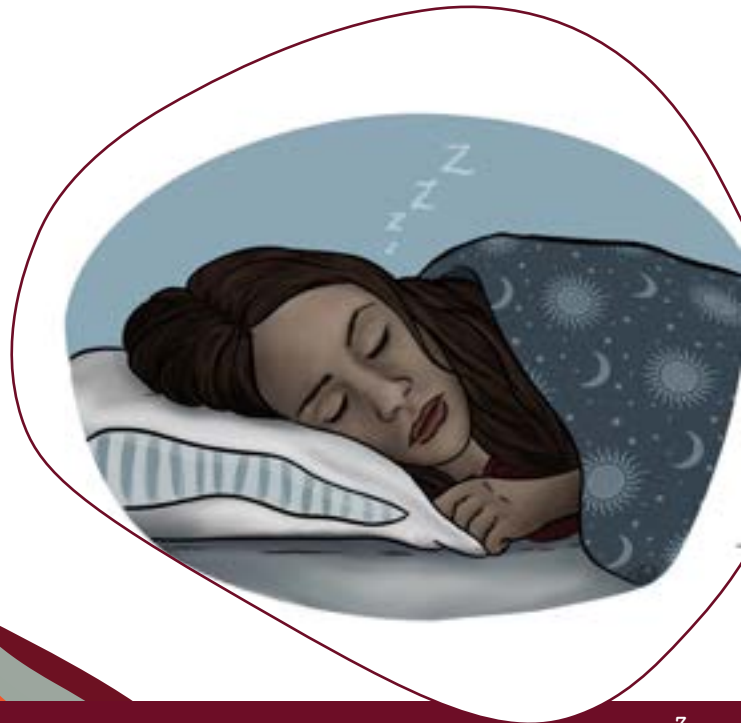


## How do you know if you have it?

Many people with hepatitis do not feel sick at all but some people may:

- feel really tired and sleepy for a long time
- find their skin and white of eyes turning yellow
- have dark, tea-coloured urine (pee, wee)
- have light-coloured faeces (poo, cooma, goona, shit)
- not feel hungry or be eating less.
- feel sick.

The only way to check for hepatitis A, B and C is to see your clinic or doctor and have a blood test.



# Hepatitis A

## What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is caused by the hepatitis A virus. It is found in the faeces (poo) of people with the virus.

## How do you get it?

You can get hepatitis A if you get a tiny bit of virus in your mouth.

You can get hepatitis A from:

- not washing and cleaning your hands really well with soap (or just water if there is no soap) after going to the toilet
- touching anything that could have small amounts of faeces (poo) on it such as nappies, used condoms, bedding or towels
- food, plates, spoons, forks or knives handled by a person who has it
- cups, glasses, bottles or cans shared with a person who has it
- sharing cigarettes, bongs, joints or pipes, syringes, needles, tourniquets or spoons handled by a person who has it
- licking or kissing near the bum of a person who has it
- dirty water.

## How do you get tested?

The only way to check for hepatitis A is to see your clinic or doctor and have a blood test.

## What if you have it?

Most people who get hepatitis A get better by themselves without any treatment. To get better faster, drink lots of water, rest, eat healthy food (not fatty) and stay away from grog and other drugs.



## How do you stop it?

- Get immunised – see your clinic or doctor.
- Always wash your hands (use soap and rub hands together really well):
  - after going to toilet
  - after changing nappies
  - after sex
  - before and after handling food, cups, plates and cutlery
  - before and after injecting, tattooing or piercing.
- Use a dam when giving mouth to anus oral sex (rim job).
- Never share injecting or smoking equipment.



## Hepatitis B

### What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is caused by the hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B virus is found in the blood, semen (cum), vaginal fluids and breast milk of people with the virus.

### How do you get it?

You can get hepatitis B by:

- sharing needles or other injecting equipment with a person who has it
- having sex without a condom and/or dam and lube with a person who has it.

A baby can also get hepatitis B at or around the time of birth if their birthing parent has it.

### How do you get tested?

The only way to check for hepatitis B is to see your clinic or doctor and have a blood test.



## What if you have it?

Most adults who get hepatitis B get better over time. You may feel better by resting, eating healthy (not fatty) food and staying away from grog and other drugs.



Some people can feel well but keep the virus in their bodies. These people have 'chronic hepatitis B' and can spread the infection to others. These people can get really sick after many years. If you have chronic hepatitis B, it is important to get regular liver check-ups (every 6–12 months) as this may be the only way to know if your liver is being damaged. There are medicines that can help – talk to your clinic or doctor.

Most babies who get hepatitis B will develop chronic hepatitis B and may get really sick. If you are pregnant or trying to have a baby, get tested for hepatitis B as early as possible to keep you and your baby healthy. You must also make sure your baby is immunised at birth.

## How do you stop it?

- Get immunised – you can get immunised against hepatitis B by having 3 injections by your doctor over 6 months. You need to have all 3 injections or you might not be protected.
- It's good for your babies and kids to get immunised too.
- Use condoms with water-based lube and/or dams every time you have sex (see page 13 for condom tips).
- If you inject drugs, use a new or your own needle every time. Never share needles and other injecting equipment, even with friends and family.
- Always use sterile, single use needles for body piercing or tattooing.
- Use your own dental floss, razor and other personal hygiene equipment.
- Don't let other people's blood get into your blood – cover all cuts and sores.



# Hepatitis C

## What is hepatitis C?

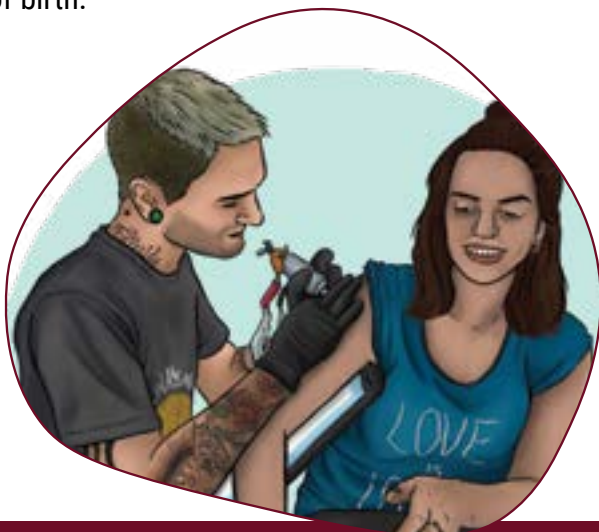
Hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C virus is found in the blood of people who have the infection.

## How do you get it?

You can only get hepatitis C if the blood of a person with hepatitis C gets into your blood. You cannot tell if someone has hepatitis C just by looking at them, and often people don't know they have it.

In Australia, most people get hepatitis C from sharing drug injecting equipment. Getting a tattoo or piercing using un-sterile equipment is also a risk. There is also a risk of getting hepatitis C from having unprotected sex where blood is present or there is damage to the skin.

There is a small chance that a birthing parent can pass hepatitis C to their baby at or around the time of birth.



## How do you get tested?

The only way to check for hepatitis C is to see your clinic or doctor and have a blood test.



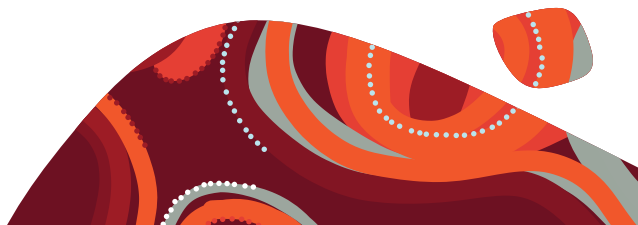
## What if you have it?

Better treatments are available for hepatitis C that only need to be taken for 2 or 3 months. These treatments have far fewer side effects than the treatments available in the past. With treatment, most people will be able to get rid of the virus. But, you can catch hepatitis C more than once. If you get hepatitis C again you can get treated again.

Talk to the clinic or doctor about treatment.

## What happens if you don't get treated?

Without treatment, the virus can stay in your body. Over time you may get tired, lose your appetite, and start to feel very sick. Your liver will get very sick, and your chance of liver failure and cancer increases. Untreated hepatitis C can lead to death. You can also spread hepatitis C to other people without knowing it.



## How do you stop it?

- If you inject drugs, use a new or your own needle every time. Never share needles and other injecting equipment, even with friends and family.
- Always use sterile, single use needles for body piercing or tattooing.
- Use your own toothbrush, dental floss, razor and other personal hygiene equipment.
- Don't let other people's blood get into your blood – cover all cuts and sores.
- If you are pregnant or trying to have a baby, get tested for hepatitis C as early as possible to keep you and your baby healthy.
- Use condoms with water-based lube and/or dams every time you have sex (see page 13 for condom tips). This is really important when sex involves blood or damage to the skin, such as anal sex and/or sex with a person during their period. The chance of getting hepatitis C through penis-in-vagina sex at other times is very low.

There is NO immunisation against hepatitis C (only hepatitis A and B).

## Condom tips

1



Check expiry date and open carefully

2



Check the condom is the right way up

3



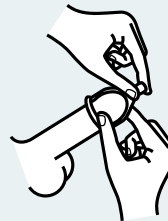
Roll down all the way

4



Apply water-based lube

5



After sex, remove carefully



## Consent

Always check in with your partner before and during sex



# More information and help

- See your local health clinic or doctor
- Call the HepatitisWA Helpline  
Metro: 9328 8538  
Country: 1800 800 070  
or visit **hepatitiswa.com.au**
- Call Peer Based Harm Reduction WA  
Metro: 9325 8387  
or visit **harmreductionwa.org**
- Call the Sexual Health Helpline  
Metro: 9227 6178  
Country: 1800 198 205

Watch our hepatitis videos using the QR codes below:



What you need to know about hepatitis B



How to treat hepatitis C

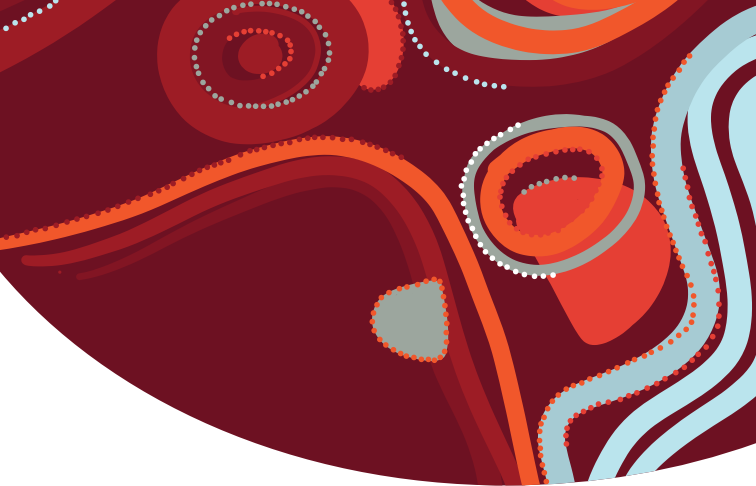
**ACE (Access, Care and Empowerment)** is a mobile app for people who inject drugs in WA. You can use the map feature to find needle and syringe programs (NSPs), needle and syringe exchange programs (NSEPs) and other relevant services. The app also provides health information on blood-borne viruses, safer injecting and safe disposal, vein care and referrals to relevant support services near you.

Download the free ACE app via the App store or Google Play.



For more information, scan the QR code





**For information about blood-borne viruses, scan the QR code:**



Illustrations by Kardy Kreations  
Background Illustration by Nani Creative

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in alternative formats.

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