

Hepatitis C testing

Information for baby boomers

Why should people born from 1945-1965 be tested for hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a virus affecting the liver. You can have it and not know it, but it can cause serious problems. More than 75 % of adults with hepatitis C in the US were born between 1945 and 1965 (baby boomers). About 1 of every 30 baby boomers has been exposed to hepatitis C.

- Doctors think many baby boomers who have the virus got it when they received blood transfusions or other blood products before 1992; from injecting or snorting drugs; getting a tattoo; serving in Vietnam; or – more rarely – from sexual contact.
- Many people do not know how or when they got infected.

Why is it important to know if you have hepatitis C?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that **every baby boomer get tested once for hepatitis C** in order to reduce the chance of serious liver problems. This is because:

- Hepatitis C can cause liver cirrhosis, liver cancer, and liver failure. All of these conditions are increasing in the US.
- The longer people are infected, the more likely they are to develop problems.
- Hepatitis C can be cured in many cases.
- If someone is treated and cured, their risk of liver failure and liver cancer is decreased.
- Once people know they have hepatitis C, they can take steps to protect their liver and reduce the risk of giving hepatitis C to others.

Getting tested for hepatitis C

- Everyone born between 1945 and 1965 needs at least one hepatitis C antibody test.
- If the antibody test is positive, it means you have been exposed to the virus. You may have an active infection, or your body may have fought off the infection at some point in the past. (About 20% of people exposed will successfully fight off the virus.)
- People with a positive antibody test need a second test to find out if there is an active infection. The second test is called the hepatitis C viral load test, or the “hepatitis C RNA test.” They also may be asked to see a hepatitis C specialist.

If your hepatitis C RNA test is positive (meaning an active hepatitis C infection)

- Stop drinking alcohol. Alcohol increases the damage to the liver caused by hepatitis C.
- Ask your health care provider if you need a vaccine against hepatitis A or B.
- Make sure your health care provider knows about all the medicine you take or may take, including prescription medicine, nonprescription medicine, vitamins, herbs, and supplements.
- Do not share any items that might have even small amounts of blood on them, like nail clippers, toothbrushes, razors, or any materials for injections.
- Hugging, kissing, and sharing eating utensils are ok. Ask your doctor if you need special precautions while having sex.

If you have any questions, please call 617-632-9774 to reach our hepatitis C virus educator in the Liver Center at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

Additional resources:

www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis
www.hepc.liverfoundation.org