



# THE FACTS: Hepatitis C (HCV)

## What is It?

Hepatitis C is a serious disease caused by a virus that affects the liver. Often people have no symptoms. Others may develop fatigue, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), nausea and loss of appetite. Many people become chronic carriers and carry the virus for a long time, possibly a lifetime. These people are at risk for liver complications and are capable of spreading the virus to others.

## How Does it Spread?

Contact through blood or bloody body fluids of an infected person through:

- Sharing needles or other drug paraphernalia
- Transfusions of blood or blood products prior to 1990 (testing for HCV virus began in 1990)
- *Rarely* is the virus spread sexually or to newborns and household contacts

## Advice to Carriers

- Continue close follow-up with your doctor. Treatment is available for some.
- Advise sex partners and health care workers who may come in contact with your blood (doctor, dentist).
- Advise sex partner:
  - Precautions are not necessary in long term sexual relationships except for avoiding intercourse during menstrual bleeding.
  - Always use a condom when having sex with different partners.
- Cover open wounds.
- Never share personal hygiene items that may be contaminated by blood such as toothbrushes, nail file or razor blades.
- Never donate blood, organs or semen.
- Over the counter medications may be damaging to your liver (e.g. Tylenol), check with your doctor first before taking.
- Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccines are recommended and are available free of charge.
- Persons who use intravenous drugs must **not share** any injection equipment. Dispose injection equipment carefully. Sharps must be placed in a hard plastic shell container with a tight fitting lid. Contact the needle exchange program at 624-2005.
- Clean up blood spills with detergent and disinfect with diluted household bleach.
- Avoid or limit alcohol consumption. Alcohol can further damage your liver.

**For Further Information Contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318  
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**

