

## HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver and can lead to liver disease.

### **Symptoms – Acute Infection**

Only 5 in 100 people have symptoms when they first get Hepatitis C. The symptoms can be mild flu like symptoms or nausea, vomiting and jaundice (skin and eyes become yellow).

### **Symptoms – Chronic Infections (longer than 6 months)**

For those with a chronic infection, symptoms can be mild to moderate and can include tiredness, lethargy, nausea (especially after alcohol or a fatty meal) and abdominal discomfort. These symptoms can take years to develop.

### **Transmission**

There are three modes of transmission: blood, mother to child and, occasionally, sexual activities.

#### *Blood to blood contact:*

- sharing injecting equipment;
- unsterile tattooing;
- body piercing;
- skin penetration activities; and
- sharing toothbrushes and razors.

#### *Sexual contact*

Sexual contact with someone who has Hepatitis C carries a very small risk of transmission. Sexual activity that results in transmission involves blood (menstrual blood, blood from skin breaks, piercing or tears).

#### *Mother to baby*

There is less than a 5% risk of transmission from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy and delivery. Breastfeeding is only a concern if nipples are cracked.

### **Diagnosis**

Hepatitis C is diagnosed by a blood test. The blood test can show if a person has had contact with the virus in the past. This is important because about 30% of people who have been in contact with Hepatitis C will no longer carry the virus.

If this test is positive further tests will be able to tell if the virus is still present.

### **Treatment**

Treatment is available if there is evidence of damage to the liver being caused by the virus. Treatment is not always effective and involves a 6-12 month course of injections and oral medications. Some people use complementary treatments.

Treatment is only available through a liver specialist.

### **Partners**

Sexual partners of people with chronic Hepatitis C are at a very small risk of acquiring Hepatitis C. The risk is increased if there is bleeding due to sexual practices or menstruation.

Injecting partners who share gear, any gear, are at risk of acquiring Hepatitis C. For more information about safer injecting contact your local Needle Syringe Program.

There is no vaccination available, so be blood aware. Do not share piercing or tattooing equipment, razors, toothbrushes or other household items that may have traces of blood on them.

*Sexual Health Service Tasmania is staffed Monday to Friday from 8.30 am until 5.00 pm. Clinic times vary from site to site so please contact your local office for details (see contact details on back page).*

**Sexual Health Service  
Clinical Services**

**HOBART**

60 Collins Street  
Hobart 7000  
Ph: (03) 6233 3557

**LAUNCESTON**

42 Canning Street  
Launceston 7250  
Ph: (03) 6336 2216

**DEVONPORT**

23 Steele Street  
Devonport 7310  
Ph: (03) 6421 7759

**BURNIE**

11 Jones Street  
BURNIE 7320  
Ph: (03) 6434 6315

**SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICE  
A joint Australian and State  
Government Program**

*The Royal Hobart Hospital is Tasmania's largest hospital and provides a number of state-wide services including cardiothoracic surgery, neurosurgery, burns management, hyperbaric and diving medicine, neonatal intensive care and high-risk obstetrics. It is the major teaching and research hospital for the State and works closely with the University of Tasmania.*

*Many students in the health care professions are taught within the Hospital, and gaining skills in examining and interviewing patients is an important part of their education and training. We ask for your co-operation and encourage you to participate in our teaching and research activities. Your permission is required for participation.*

The Royal Hobart Hospital encourages feedback from patients, relatives and visitors. This feedback helps staff to better understand the needs of patients and provide the best possible patient care.



**The Royal Hobart Hospital  
is a smoke-free site**

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**Information  
Pamphlet**

Sexual  
Health  
SERVICE

**Hepatitis C**