

Why do people who were incarcerated have such high rates of hepatitis C?

Prisons and jails often exceed their recommended capacities, so exposure to HCV greatly increases for those who are incarcerated. **Hepatitis C is spread through blood and can live outside of the body for days and weeks.** Incarcerated populations may have shared **needles for injecting drugs**, which is the leading causes of newly infected individuals. It's also highly likely for people who are incarcerated to share **tattooing equipment** with others before any sterilization or proper cleaning, along with sharing of **personal hygiene items, such as toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, and shears**, all of which can expose a person to the hepatitis C virus.

Why should people be tested for hepatitis C upon release?

Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne virus in America. It is estimated that 30% of all people living with HCV spend at least part of the year in prison. Knowing your status can help prevent the spread of the virus to others. **Get tested upon release.** Testing for HCV requires two tests: the antibody screening and a follow-up HCV RNA test to confirm the infection.

If you test positive for HCV RNA:

- **Protect your family and friends. Don't share** anything that may be exposed to blood. Personal hygiene items can pass contaminated blood from one person to the next. If these items must be shared, reduce the risk of transmission by cleaning them with bleach and rinse with water before use.
- **Get treated.** If you were recently released from jail or prison you have options. Hepatitis C is curable. Treatment can be as easy as 1 pill a day for 8 to 12 weeks. Most states have a reentry program that can help you get insurance and find a doctor at federally qualified health centers (FQHC) or community health centers with HCV trained staff.

What should people who were incarcerated know about hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a serious liver disease resulting from the hepatitis C virus (HCV) and is very common in people who have been incarcerated. The CDC estimates that 16%-41% of inmates in the USA have been exposed to HCV and 12-35% have chronic infection.

Most people who get infected develop a lifelong or chronic infection and most don't know they are infected. Over time, chronic hepatitis C can cause serious health problems including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death. Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver cancer and liver transplants in the USA.

What should you expect when seeking treatment?

Before prescribing treatment your doctor will need to determine the health of your liver and assess any damage that HCV has done to your liver. They will do this by running a series of blood tests and an imaging test. In some cases, it can take up to six months to get treated for hepatitis C. During that time it is important to stay in contact with your doctor.

To prepare for treatment, consider finding case management or health education services that supports and empowers you to stay engaged and cured.

Remember, if you don't protect yourself from HCV after treatment, you can become reinfected. Staying Hep C free is up to you.

National Support Services

**877-Help-4-HEP
(877-435-7443)**

Local Support Services

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After Incarceration & HEPATITIS



**DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE.
IT AFFECTS MILLIONS
AND CAUSES LIVER CANCER.**

Talk to your doctor about testing. Early detection saves lives.



www.CaringAmbassadors.org

Liver Health

Your liver is a pretty cool organ and is often called the 'non-complaining' organ. Your liver is located on the right side of your body and acts as your body's filter. Therefore, everything you eat, drink, smell, and absorb through your skin gets processed through the liver, which means it may be frequently exposed to alcohol and various toxins. Since the liver does not complain, we often do not know when something is wrong.

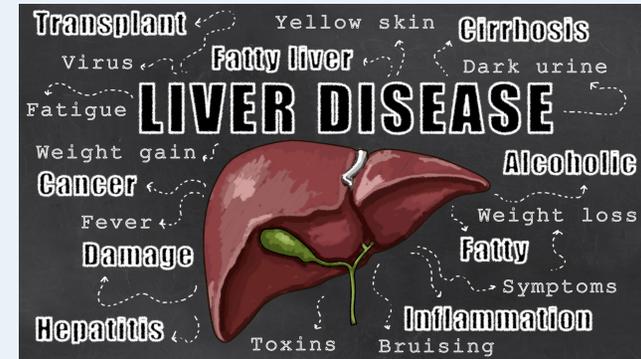
Liver disease is on the rise, and liver cancer is now the second leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide.

There are a few culprits that put the liver at risk, one being Fatty Liver Disease, also called Nonalcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH). NASH develops when there is an excess buildup of fat in the liver. Also, you don't even have to be overweight to have a fatty liver! Cirrhosis is caused by inflammation in the liver which causes scar

YOUR LIVER IS...

- On your right side under your ribcage
- Your largest organ without nerves
- Your body's filter system - all that you eat, drink, smell or absorb goes through your liver

tissue buildup in the liver and increases the chance of developing liver cancer. Viruses can cause liver damage, too. Among them are hepatitis A and B which are both preventable through vaccination. Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne virus in the US. Hepatitis C was unable to be tested for until 1992, and therefore it lived in blood and tissue banks for decades before it was identified. Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver disease, and most people don't know they have it. Talk with your healthcare provider about a series of liver function tests including a hepatitis C antibody test, and hepatitis A and B vaccinations to protect your liver.



WHAT CAN HURT YOUR LIVER?

- A diet high in fat
- Viruses like hepatitis A, B and C
- Toxins like lead-based paint, pesticides, solvents, etc.
- Alcohol, some medications (even over the counter), and some street drugs

Always ask your healthcare provider before taking a new product to make sure it is not toxic to the liver.

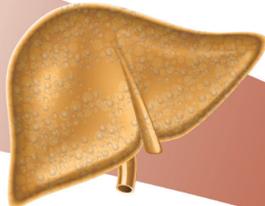
Natural Progression of Hepatitis C

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NORMAL LIVER

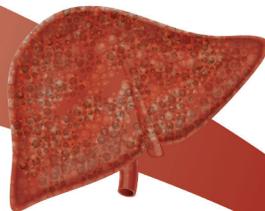


CHRONIC HEPATITIS



20-25 YEARS

CIRRHOSIS



25-30 YEARS

**LIVER CANCER
TRANSPLANT
DEATH**



Hepatitis C

If you have cirrhosis of the liver it is important to ask your doctor for a twice-yearly scan for liver cancer. Liver cancer is curable if diagnosed early.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR LIVER HEALTHY

- Reduce or eliminate your alcohol intake
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B
- Ask your healthcare professional to test you for hepatitis C antibodies
- Eat a well-balanced and lower fat diet
- Practice good sleeping habits
- Stay active and exercise regularly
- Manage your stress
- Learn and practice harm reduction — never share personal items
- Try to avoid environmental toxins
- Drink plenty of water; eight to ten 8-ounce glasses a day.