



Hepatitis C

What Is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis is a general term that means inflammation of the liver. The Greek word hepa refers to the liver, and itis means inflammation. Hepatitis has several possible causes, including:

Microorganisms, including viruses

- Fatty liver disease
- Toxins and chemicals, including alcohol
- Autoimmune disease, in which the immune system attacks the body.

Hepatitis C is a contagious but curable disease caused by a virus that infects the liver. Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a blood-borne virus that can cause lifelong infection, liver fibrosis, cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure and death.

There are two phases of hepatitis C infection—acute and chronic. Acute infection refers to a new HCV infection that was acquired less than six months ago. An infection that lasts more than six months is chronic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 2 million people in the United States are living with chronic hepatitis C. The number of new cases of HCV is steadily rising, largely due to the opioid epidemic. There were more than 5,000 new cases of acute hepatitis C and more than 107,500 newly reported cases of chronic hepatitis C in 2021, according to the CDC. Nearly 60% of people with hepatitis report injection drug use.

The World Health Organization estimates that [58 million people](#) are living with chronic hepatitis C worldwide, and around 290,000 people died as a result of hepatitis C in 2019.

Last Reviewed: April 1, 2024