



Hepatitis C

A virus infection of the liver that can now be cured

PE-GIC-18

Hepatitis C is a virus that can silently damage the liver over many years. Today it is cured in more than 95 out of 100 people with 8 to 12 weeks of tablets, which are usually well tolerated. Anyone who may have been exposed should be tested, and international guidelines advise that every adult be tested at least once.

What is it?

Hepatitis C virus infects the liver. In most people who catch it, the infection becomes long term. It usually causes no symptoms for many years, but over decades it can lead to scarring (cirrhosis) and liver cancer. Finding and treating it early prevents this.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis C is spread mainly through blood:

- Blood transfusions or blood products received before routine screening was introduced
- Medical or dental procedures, injections or dialysis with unsterile equipment, especially in the past
- Sharing needles or other equipment for injecting drugs
- Tattoos, piercing or cupping (hijama) with unsterile tools
- Shared razors or toothbrushes
- Less commonly, from mother to baby or through sexual contact

It is not spread by hugging, sharing food or utensils, or breastfeeding.

Tests

- Hepatitis C antibody test: shows that you have been exposed at some time. It stays positive for life, even after cure

- Hepatitis C RNA (viral load) test: confirms whether the infection is present now
- Liver blood tests and a FibroScan to check for scarring
- Tests for hepatitis B and HIV, because hepatitis B can flare during hepatitis C treatment if it is not recognised

Treatment

Treatment is with direct-acting antiviral tablets, taken once a day for 8 or 12 weeks. Most current treatments work for all types (genotypes) of the virus. Side effects are usually mild, such as headache or tiredness.

- Take every dose at the same time each day until the course is finished
- Tell your team about every medicine, herbal product and supplement you take. Some, including certain acid-reducing medicines, the heart medicine amiodarone, some epilepsy medicines and some contraceptive pills, interact with treatment. If you take warfarin or diabetes medicines, your monitoring may need to be closer during treatment
- Treatment is not usually given during pregnancy. Avoid becoming pregnant during treatment and discuss family planning with your doctor. If ribavirin is added to your treatment, it can seriously harm an unborn baby: women taking it, and the wives or partners of men taking it, must use effective contraception during treatment and for 6 to 9 months afterwards, depending on the product. Your team will tell you the exact period

Confirming cure

A blood test for the virus is done 12 weeks after finishing treatment. If no virus is found, you are cured. Because the antibody test stays positive for life, any future check for the virus must use the RNA test.

After cure

- Cure does not protect you from catching hepatitis C again. Avoid the risks listed above
- There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but you should be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B if you are not already immune
- If you had cirrhosis or advanced scarring before treatment, you still need a liver ultrasound every six months for liver cancer, and ongoing cirrhosis care

- Keep a healthy weight and avoid alcohol completely, so that fatty liver or alcohol do not cause new damage

Get urgent medical care if you have

- Yellow eyes or skin
- Vomiting blood or passing black stools
- Confusion or unusual sleepiness
- Swelling of the abdomen
- A severe rash or feeling very unwell during treatment

Common questions

Is the treatment hard to take?

Usually not. It is a short course of tablets with few side effects. Most people continue their normal daily life during treatment.

Where can I be tested in Oman?

There is no programme to test every adult, but the test is available at any health centre. It is done before employment and before marriage, for people with raised liver tests or cirrhosis, and whenever a doctor thinks it is needed. You can also ask to be tested.

Should my family be tested?

The risk to family members through ordinary daily contact is very low. Testing is advised for your husband or wife, or any other sexual partner, anyone who has shared razors or needles with you, and children born to a mother with hepatitis C.

Can I marry and have children?

Yes. Spread to a husband or wife, or any other sexual partner, is uncommon. Ideally, treatment is completed before pregnancy.

I was cured years ago, but my antibody test is still positive. Am I infected?

No. The antibody stays positive for life. Only the RNA test shows whether the virus is present.

This leaflet is general information and does not replace advice from your own doctor. Version 1.0, October 2026. Next review October 2028.

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