

# Fact Sheet

## Hepatitis C

**Pathogenicity:** Onset is insidious, with anorexia, vague abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting, progressing to jaundice; severity ranges from unapparent cases in approximately 75% of infections to rate fulminating, fatal cases. Chronic liver disease with fluctuating or persistently elevated liver enzymes is common, occurring in >60% of HCV infections in adults. Those with chronic liver disease, 30%-60% may develop chronic active hepatitis and 5%-20% may develop cirrhosis. Chronic infection is often not symptomatic.

**Mode of Transmission:** Per cutaneous exposure to contaminated blood and plasma derivatives. Contaminated needles and syringes are important vehicles of spread, especially among injecting drug users. The risk of HCV transmission by household contact and sexual activity has not been well defined but efficiency of transmission vis these routes appears to be low. Vertical transmission appears to be uncommon, however, the risk of transmission may increase when the mother is co-infected with HIV.

**Incubation Period:** Ranges from 2 weeks to 6 months; most commonly 6-9 weeks

**Communicability:** From one or more weeks before onset of first symptoms; may persist in most persons indefinitely

**Disinfectants:** Because HCV is an enveloped virus, general inactivation measures against HBV are applicable.

**Treatment:** Interferon alpha has been shown to have an overall beneficial effect in about 25% of chronic hepatitis cases.