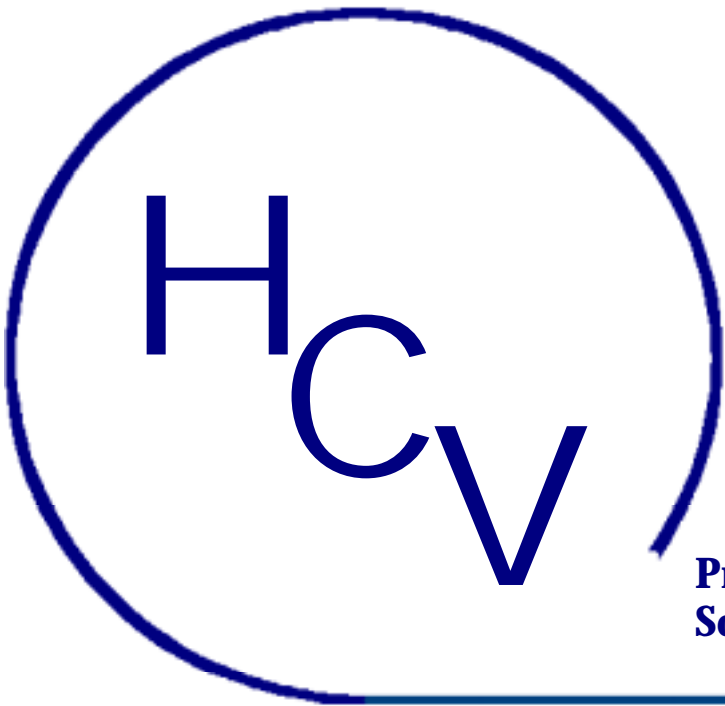


# WHAT EVERY SONOMA COUNTY RESIDENT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HEPATITIS C



**Prepared by the  
Sonoma County Hepatitis C Task Force**

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## INTRODUCTION

Hepatitis C has been termed the silent epidemic. It is the most common blood-borne infection reported in both Sonoma County and the U.S. It is estimated that about 2% of the U.S. population, roughly 4 million people, is infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV). This means that in Sonoma County about 9,000 people are likely infected (range 6,900-10,600). Based on national studies, it is estimated that 75% of individuals who have hepatitis C do not know it. Hepatitis C impacts our community by increasing illness and disability, reducing quality of life and productivity, and increasing healthcare costs.

In 1999, a group of local health services agencies formed the Sonoma County Hepatitis C Task Force to collaborate on a local response to hepatitis C. The purpose of this report is to educate the community to prevent the spread of hepatitis C and to encourage individuals at-risk to be tested.

## HEPATITIS C PREVALENCE IN SONOMA COUNTY

- An estimated 6,900 to 10,600 people in Sonoma County have chronic hepatitis C.
- In 1999, 572 cases of chronic hepatitis C were reported in Sonoma County.
- Nineteen Sonoma County residents died from hepatitis C in 1999. As of August of 2000, there have been 14 hepatitis C deaths in our county this year.
- Between April 1999 and April 2000, 26% of the 425 people tested for hepatitis C at the Drug Abuse Alternatives Center (DAAC) testing sites in Sonoma County were positive.
- It is estimated 40% of chronic liver disease in Sonoma County is hepatitis C related.
- Between one-quarter and one-third of all liver transplants are performed for end-stage hepatitis C.



## WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus. The virus is found in the blood of persons who have hepatitis C. It is spread by contact with the blood of an infected person.

Initially called non-A non-B hepatitis, hepatitis C was first identified in 1971. It wasn't until 1989 that the test for specific antibodies to the virus was developed. Hepatitis C occurs among people of all ages and races.

### Symptoms:

Hepatitis C can remain undiagnosed for many years, because its symptoms are not readily apparent until liver damage has occurred. For the majority of patients, there are no physical signs of the disease until two or more decades after infection. Even if symptoms are present, they may be very mild and flu-like: fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite, fever, headaches and abdominal pain. Whether or not a person with hepatitis C has symptoms, he or she can transmit the infection to others by blood to blood contact.

### How Hepatitis C Differs from Hepatitis A and B

Each type of hepatitis is spread differently. Hepatitis A is generally spread by infected human feces through poor hygiene. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with infected body fluids and blood. Hepatitis C is spread through contact with infected blood.

All types of hepatitis cause inflammation of the liver. Unlike hepatitis C, there are vaccines for hepatitis A and B. In most cases, with proper treatment, patients recover from hepatitis A and B with no long-term health problems.

### The Long-term Effect on the Body

Most people who are infected with hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. Most of them have some liver damage, but many do not feel sick from the disease. Some individuals with liver damage due to HCV may develop cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver and liver failure. This may take many years to develop.

It is estimated that of every 100 persons infected with hepatitis C:

- 85 persons may develop long-term infection
- 70 persons may develop chronic liver disease
- 15 persons may develop cirrhosis over a period of 20 to 30 years
- 5 persons may die from the consequences of long term infection (liver cancer or cirrhosis)

## HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF FROM HEPATITIS C AND OTHER DISEASES SPREAD BY CONTACT WITH HUMAN BLOOD?

- Don't ever inject drugs. If you do inject drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. Never reuse or share syringes, water, or drug works, and get vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care articles. They might have blood on them.
- If you are a healthcare worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharp instruments. Get vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Consider the health risks if you are thinking about a

tattoo or body piercing: You can get infected if:

- the tools that are used have someone else's blood on them.
- the artist or piercer doesn't follow good health practices such as washing hands and using disposable gloves.

There is NO vaccine for hepatitis C. Vaccines for hepatitis A and B do not provide immunity against hepatitis C. It will be difficult to develop a vaccine for hepatitis C, because there are various strains of the virus and it mutates.

***HCV is not spread by kissing, sneezing, hugging, coughing, food or water, sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, or by other casual contact. Persons should not be excluded from work, school, play, child-care or other settings on the basis of their HCV infection status.***

## **WHO SHOULD BE TESTED FOR HEPATITIS C?**

Hepatitis C spreads by contact with an infected person's blood. You should get tested for HCV if you:

- have ever injected illegal drugs (even if only once or a few times many years ago)
- received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before July 1992
- were treated for clotting problems with a blood product made before 1987
- have ever been on long-term kidney dialysis
- were notified that you received blood from a donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C
- have signs or symptoms of liver disease (e.g., abnormal liver enzyme tests)
- are a healthcare worker who has been exposed to HCV positive blood on the job (e.g., needle sticks or splashes to the eye)
- were born to a mother with HCV infection

Some studies suggest inhalant use of illegal drugs may be a risk factor. In rare cases, hepatitis C can be spread by sex, but this does not occur very often. It is more likely to be spread through sexual activity with multiple partners where condoms are not used.

## **WHY TEST FOR HEPATITIS C?**

Early diagnosis is important so you can be:

- checked for liver disease.
- get treatment, if indicated.
- learn how you can protect your liver from further harm.
- learn how you can prevent spreading HCV to others.

## **WHERE CAN YOU BE TESTED FOR**

## **HEPATITIS C?**

If you think you may be at risk for hepatitis C, contact your physician's office or health care provider to discuss your concerns. Your health care provider will advise you if he or she thinks you should be tested.

If you do not have a physician or health care provider, you may call one of the following for information about how to get tested or for referrals to medical help:

### *Sonoma County Department of Health Services*

Has staff available to answer fundamental questions about hepatitis C and to provide appropriate referrals. Staff is also available for educational presentations about hepatitis C for schools, health care or service providers, and other groups. (707) 565-4747 or 565-5103

### *Drug Abuse Alternatives Center*

Provides physician/medical clinic referrals. Also has an outreach program that distributes risk/education materials. (707) 544-3295

Testing for hepatitis C is also available at the following weekly drop-in hepatitis C testing clinics open to the general public:

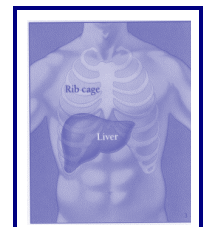
- Drug Abuse Alternatives Center, 2403 Professional Dr., Suite 101, Santa Rosa.  
(707) 544-3295 for information. \$20 or sliding scale fee.  
Mondays, Noon - 4 p.m.; Thursdays, 2 - 5 p.m.  
Mondays, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. Bilingual Spanish clinic
- Casa Calmecca Spanish speaking clinic and HCV counseling, 857 Dutton Ave.  
(707) 573-0117 or (707) 573-1590 for information. No fee.  
Wednesdays, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU TEST POSITIVE**

Discuss treatment options with your physician. Medical treatment is indicated for certain people with hepatitis C. If you do not have a physician, call the Sonoma County Health Services Dept., (707) 565-4747, or the Drug Abuse Alternatives Center, (707) 544-3295 for referral to a health care provider.

## **IF YOU HAVE HCV, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOUR LIVER?**

- Stop using alcohol.
- See your doctor regularly.
- Don't start any new medicines or use over-the-counter, herbal or other medicines without a physician's knowledge.
- If you use drugs, talk with a drug



treatment counselor.

- Become informed about hepatitis C.
- Consider vaccination against hepatitis A and B.

Involvement with a support group may help patients cope with hepatitis C.

## **IF YOU ARE INFECTED WITH HCV, HOW CAN YOU AVOID SPREADING IT TO OTHERS?**

- Do not donate blood, body organs, other tissue or semen.
- Do not share personal items that might have your blood on them, such as toothbrushes, dental appliances, nail-grooming equipment or razors.
- Cover your cuts and skin sores to keep from spreading HCV.

## **LOCAL RESOURCES FOR HEPATITIS C TREATMENT, EDUCATION AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

### *Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa Family Practice Center*

Available to Sutter Family Practice Center patients only, a full service hepatitis C clinic operates two Wednesday afternoons per month at 3320 Chanate Rd. Confirmatory hepatitis C screenings also available. Call (707) 576-4100 for an appointment.

### *Kaiser Santa Rosa Services for Members*

Provides comprehensive care of hepatitis C patients with a medical team consisting of primary care physicians and gastroenterologists. Health educators and behavioral medicine providers assist with educating patients and helping them cope with the stress associated with receiving the diagnosis. Kaiser also has a hepatitis C hotline, (707) 571-3021, that provides recommendations on who should be tested, how to get tested, how you will receive your results, and directs members to the appropriate personnel for more information.

### *Redwood Community Health Centers*

A consortium of health care centers dedicated to high quality, accessible and affordable health services. Most health centers accept: MediCal, Healthy Families, and other low cost and commercial insurance programs. Fees are based on the ability to pay. Spanish spoken at most health centers. Hepatitis C testing and referrals are available. Call for an appointment.

### **Cloverdale:**

*Copper Towers Family Medical Center* 894-4229

### **Healdsburg:**

*Alliance Medical Center* 433-5494

### **Guerneville:**

*Russian River Health Center* 869-2849

### **Occidental:**

*Occidental Area Health Center* 874-2444

### **Santa Rosa:**

*Commonwoman's Health Project* 578-1700

*Sonoma County Indian Health Project* 544-4056

*Southwest Community Health Center* 547-2222

*Sutter Family Practice Center* 576-4100

### **Sonoma:**

*Sonoma Valley Community Health Ctr* 939-6070

### **Petaluma:**

*Petaluma Health Center* 763-7005

### *Northern California Center for Well-Being*

Provides health education classes taught by a registered nurse for individuals diagnosed with hepatitis C and their family members, caregivers and other support people. Topics include up-to-date information on the diagnosis, treatment, complications, transmission, self-care and lifestyle effects of hepatitis C. Sliding scale fee. (707) 575-6043 for information.

### *Drug Abuse Alternatives Center*

Has an informational "Next Steps" packet for individuals who test positive for hepatitis C. (707) 544-3295 for information.

### *Redwood Health Library*

314 Western Ave., Petaluma. A comprehensive health library designed for the general public. Staffed by a professional medical librarian who can research information about hepatitis C. Hours, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 am - 4:00 pm, and Wednesdays, 1 - 8 pm (707) 778-9114 for information.

### *American Liver Foundation*

Has written materials about hepatitis C. Call 1(888) 4HEP-ABC (443-7222) or 1(800) GOLIVER (405-4830).

## **Support Groups**

**Petaluma:** Sponsored by the Petaluma Health Care District and the American Liver Foundation. Fourth Thursday of the month, 7:00 - 8:30 pm at 314 Western Ave. Free. Open to patients with hepatitis or other liver diseases. Facilitated by a hepatitis patient who had a liver transplant. (707) 778-9114 for information.

**Santa Rosa:** Sponsored by DAAC. Every Tuesday, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., first time participants attend at 3:30 p.m., 2403 Professional Dr., Suite 103. Free. (707) 544-3295 for information.

## **INTERNET WEB SITES**

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c)

[www.niaid.nih.gov/information/search.htm](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/information/search.htm)

[www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hepatitisc.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hepatitisc.html)

**[www.healthfinder.org/HTMLGen/HFKeyword.cfm?](http://www.healthfinder.org/HTMLGen/HFKeyword.cfm?Keyword+hepatitis+c)  
[www.sonoma-county.org](http://www.sonoma-county.org)**

Copies of this report may be directly downloaded from

[www.sonoma-county.org/ph](http://www.sonoma-county.org/ph).

*Portions of this report were excerpted from [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatit](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatit)*