

Viral Hepatitis

Hepatitis A, B, C and D

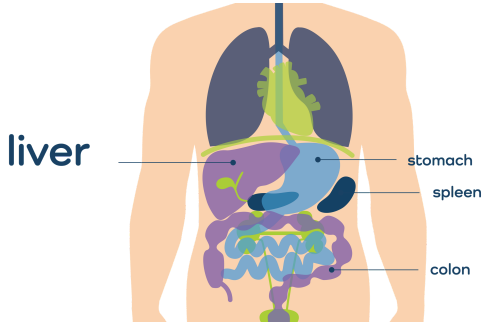


liver canada

Your liver and why it's so important!



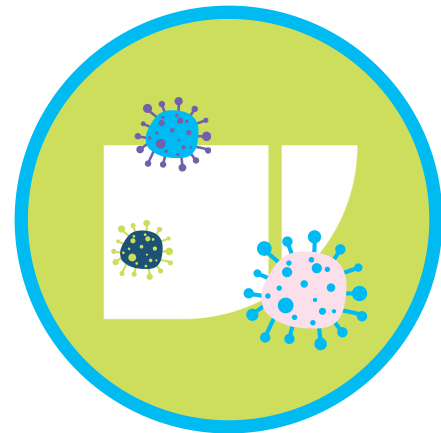
Your liver is one of the largest and hardest-working organs in your body. Located under your ribs on the right side of your abdomen, your liver:



- Filters harmful substances from your blood
- Helps digest food by producing bile
- Stores nutrients and energy
- Fights infections
- Produces, regulates, and balances hormones

What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis is the inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by things like viruses, certain medications, alcohol, or autoimmune conditions. When the liver is inflamed, it can't perform important jobs well, like cleaning your blood, digestion and absorption, and storing energy.



What is viral hepatitis?

Viral hepatitis is a group of infections that cause inflammation in the liver. Over time, this can lead to liver scarring, liver failure, or even liver cancer.

There are several main types of viral hepatitis. In Canada, the most common types of viral hepatitis are A, B, and C, while hepatitis D is considered rare. Each type is caused by a different virus and is transmitted in different ways. Some are short-term infections, while others can become chronic and lead to serious liver damage.



Viral hepatitis is present in Canada and awareness is your first step in prevention and treatment. Understanding how to protect yourself and others is essential for a healthier and safer community.

Hepatitis A (HAV)

Hepatitis A is a short-term infection caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). It leads to inflammation of the liver but does not become chronic. Most people recover fully within a few weeks or months.

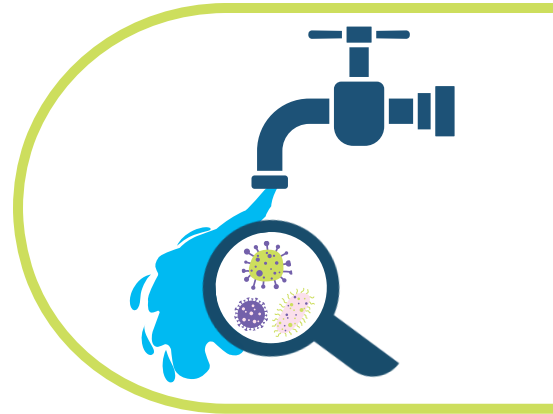
For healthy individuals, hepatitis A can be uncomfortable but is usually not serious. The liver typically heals without lasting damage. In rare cases, especially in older adults or those with existing liver conditions, it can lead to more serious complications including acute liver failure.

How do you get hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is most often spread through the fecal-oral route, which means you can get the virus by eating or drinking something that's been contaminated with tiny amounts of stool (feces) from someone who has the virus.

How is hepatitis A spread?

- Eating food or drinking water that's been contaminated, especially in places with poor sanitation
- Close contact with someone who has hepatitis A, like in a household or daycare setting
- Having intimate connections with someone who has the virus (especially oral-anal contact)
- Traveling to a country where hepatitis A is common without getting vaccinated



You can't get hepatitis A through casual contact like hugging, sneezing, or being around someone in public.

What are the symptoms?



Loss of appetite



**Stomach pain
or discomfort**



**Feeling very tired
(fatigue)**



Fever



Joint or muscle pain



Pale stools



Feeling nauseous or throwing up



Dark urine



Yellowing of eyes or skin (jaundice)

How is hepatitis A diagnosed and treated?

A blood test can confirm hepatitis A. While there is no specific medication for a cure, your liver will usually heal on its own as your body fights off the virus.

How can you prevent hepatitis A?

Get vaccinated! The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and highly effective. It's given as two doses, usually six months apart, and provides long-term protection.

Who should get the hepatitis A vaccine?

- ✓ Individuals travelling to hepatitis A-endemic areas
- ✓ Zoo keepers, veterinarians and researchers who care for non-human primates
- ✓ Household or close contacts of children adopted from hepatitis A-endemic countries
- ✓ Those working in hepatitis A research or hepatitis A vaccination development
- ✓ Individuals living in communities at risk of hepatitis A outbreaks
- ✓ Persons with lifestyle risks for infection, including men who have sex with men and individuals who engage in disordered substance use
- ✓ Individuals who have chronic liver disease

Hepatitis A and travel

Planning a trip? In parts of Asia, Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe, hepatitis A is more common. It can spread through contaminated food or water.

Most individuals become infected by drinking unsafe water, eating raw or undercooked food, or from poor handwashing. You can protect yourself by talking to your doctor about getting vaccinated before travel and being mindful of food and water safety.

Hepatitis B (HBV)

Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver and can cause inflammation and damage. Some people recover in a few weeks (acute hepatitis B), while others develop a lifelong infection (chronic hepatitis B), which can lead to serious problems like liver scarring, failure, or even cancer.

How do you get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B spreads through blood and certain bodily fluids, like semen or vaginal fluids. It's not spread through everyday contact like hugging, kissing, coughing, sneezing, or sharing food.

How is hepatitis B spread?

- From mother to baby during childbirth
- Intimate connections with someone who has the virus
- Sharing needles, syringes, or drug equipment
- Tattooing or piercing with unsterile tools
- Sharing razors or toothbrushes with someone infected
- Health care workers can be exposed to infected blood



What are the symptoms?

Some people, especially young children, may not have any symptoms at all. But when symptoms do appear, they can include:



Loss of appetite



**Stomach pain
or discomfort**



**Feeling very tired
(fatigue)**



Fever



**Joint or muscle
pain**



Pale stools



**Feeling nauseous
or throwing up**



Dark urine



**Yellowing of eyes
or skin (jaundice)**

How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

A simple blood test can diagnose hepatitis B. It can reveal whether you currently have the virus, had it in the past and cleared it, or have been vaccinated and are protected. Your doctor may also check how your liver is working with blood tests, and may order an ultrasound or liver scan to look for signs of inflammation or scarring.

How is hepatitis B treated?

Acute hepatitis B

If you have acute hepatitis B, your body will likely fight off the virus on its own.

What to do:

- Get plenty of rest
- Eat well and stay hydrated
- Avoid alcohol
- Let your immune system do the work

Most people recover fully and develop lifelong protection against hepatitis B.

Chronic hepatitis B

Chronic hepatitis B can be managed with antiviral medications that reduce the amount of virus in the body. While these treatments help control the infection, they do not cure it.

Antiviral medications can:

- Lessen the virus in your body
- Protect your liver
- Reduce the risk of liver cancer and cirrhosis
- Give you peace of mind

Common treatments in Canada:

- Tenofovir disoproxil fumarate (TDF)
- Tenofovir alafenamide (TAF)
- Entecavir

What you can do to lower your risk:



Get vaccinated: The hepatitis B vaccine, offered at birth or in middle school, is the best way to protect yourself and others.



Practice safe injections: Never share or reuse needles. Make sure all equipment is properly sterilized, even in healthcare or personal care settings.



Practice safe intimate connections: Use barrier methods (like condoms) to reduce the risk of spreading or getting hepatitis B through sexual contact.



Maintain good hygiene: Wash your hands often and avoid sharing personal items like razors, toothbrushes, or nail clippers.



Get screened: Regular testing helps detect hepatitis B early so it can be treated and the risk of transmission can be reduced.

How can you protect your unborn baby from hepatitis B

If you're pregnant, it's important to get tested for hepatitis B at your first prenatal visit. If the virus is detected, your baby can be protected with a vaccine and an injectable medication (HBIG) within 12 hours of birth, followed by completing the full vaccine series in their first 6 months.

Who is considered high risk?

While anyone can get hepatitis B, some people have a higher risk of being exposed to the virus. Recommended recipients of hepatitis B vaccine for pre-exposure prevention include:

- Healthcare workers and first responders
- People who inject drugs
- Sexually active individuals, including men who have intimate connections with men
- People born in or travelling to countries where hepatitis B is more common
- People who are incarcerated or work in correctional facilities
- Anyone who received a blood transfusion before 1992

If you're in a higher-risk group, taking steps to protect yourself—like getting tested and vaccinated—is a powerful way to care for your health and the health of those around you.

A photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair laughing heartily while holding a young child in a red and white striped shirt. The scene is set indoors, likely in a living room, with a window and a framed picture visible in the background.

Hepatitis is still present in Canada. You have the power to protect yourself and the next generation by getting vaccinated.

Hepatitis C (HCV)

Hepatitis C is a virus that affects the liver and can cause inflammation and damage over time. Many people don't have symptoms at first, so they may not know they have it. Without treatment, hepatitis C can lead to serious liver problems like cirrhosis, liver failure, or even liver cancer.

How do you get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C spreads when infected blood enters your bloodstream through direct blood-to-blood contact.

How is hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is mainly spread through blood-to-blood contact. This can happen through:

- Sharing needles, syringes, or drug equipment
- Sharing blood contaminated personal items like razors or nail clippers
- Getting tattoos or piercings with unsterile equipment

It's less common to be spread through intimate connections and bodily fluids, and it's not spread through casual contact like hugging, sneezing, or being around someone in public.

A mother with hepatitis C can pass the virus to her baby during childbirth, but the risk is low. There's no treatment during pregnancy, but doctors will monitor the baby after birth. Babies can be tested and treated later on if needed.

What are the symptoms?

Many people with hepatitis C don't have symptoms for years. Because symptoms are often mild or not present, many won't find out they have hepatitis C until after a routine blood test or once liver damage has already occurred. When symptoms do appear, they may include:



Loss of appetite



**Stomach pain
or discomfort**



**Feeling very tired
(fatigue)**



Fever



Joint or muscle pain



Pale stools



Feeling nauseous or throwing up



Dark urine



Yellowing of eyes or skin (jaundice)

How is hepatitis C diagnosed?

Hepatitis C is diagnosed using a blood test.

There are two steps to diagnose hepatitis C:

- Step 1: HCV antibody test – Used to assess if a person has ever been exposed to the virus.
- Step 2: HCV RNA test – Performed when the antibody test is positive. It checks for the presence of the virus in your blood to see if the infection is active.

Once diagnosed, your doctor may use an imaging test or biopsy to guide treatment options.

How is hepatitis C treated?

Hepatitis C can be cured in most people.

Treatment typically involves taking one pill a day for 8 to 12 weeks. These direct-acting antivirals (DAAs) have few side effects and cure more than 95% of people.

Common treatments in Canada include:

- Sofosbuvir/velpatasvir
- Glecaprevir/pibrentasvir
- Sofosbuvir/ledipasvir

Your doctor will recommend the best option based on the status of your liver health and your unique needs.

How can you prevent hepatitis C?

- ✔ **Wound care:** Cover and clean any cuts or sores.
- ✔ **Maintain good hygiene:** Wash your hands often and avoid sharing personal items like razors, toothbrushes, or nail clippers.
- ✔ **Practice safe injections:** Never share or reuse needles. Make sure all equipment is properly sterilized, even in healthcare or personal care settings.
- ✔ **Get screened:** Regular testing helps detect hepatitis C early so it can be treated and the risk of transmission can be reduced.

How to live a healthy life with hepatitis C:

Living with hepatitis C can feel overwhelming at times, but with the right care, support, and treatment, you can take back control of your liver health.

If treatment isn't possible right away, you can still take steps to protect your liver:

- Follow a healthy, balanced meal pattern
- Skip unnecessary medications or supplements that may stress your liver
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B
- Avoid alcohol as this may increase liver damage
- See your doctor regularly for check-ups and monitoring

Hepatitis D (HDV)

Hepatitis D (HDV) is a rare but serious liver infection that only occurs in people who already have hepatitis B. It can cause more severe liver damage, but with the right care, it can be prevented and managed.

How do you get hepatitis D?

You can only get hepatitis D if you already have hepatitis B, as the hepatitis D virus needs hepatitis B to survive and grow in your body. You can be infected with both viruses at the same time (co-infection), or get hepatitis D later if you already have hepatitis B (superinfection).

How is hepatitis D spread?

Hepatitis D spreads the same way as hepatitis B, through blood or bodily fluids. This includes:

- Sharing needles or drug equipment
- Unprotected intimate connections
- Unsterile medical, piercing, or tattoo equipment
- From mother to baby during childbirth



If you have hepatitis B, talk to your doctor about whether you should be tested for hepatitis D, especially if you were born in or have lived in regions where hepatitis D is more common, such as Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or South America. Also, if you have risk factors like injection drug use, blood transfusions in certain countries, or unsafe tattooing or piercing.



Having both hepatitis B and D can lead to faster and more severe liver damage, increasing the risk of cirrhosis, liver failure, and liver cancer, as the disease often progresses more quickly than hepatitis B alone.

How can you prevent hepatitis D?

There's no vaccine specifically for hepatitis D, but the hepatitis B vaccine protects against both viruses. Getting vaccinated against hepatitis B is the most effective way to prevent hepatitis D.

Are there treatments for hepatitis D?

New treatments for hepatitis D are becoming available in Canada. Health Canada has approved bulevirtide for certain adults with chronic hepatitis D and evidence of active disease, including those with compensated liver disease. Treatment eligibility is determined by a liver specialist and depends on factors such as liver function, viral activity, and overall health. Ongoing monitoring by a specialist is important to help manage the disease and support long-term liver health.

A summary of viral hepatitis

Type of Hepatitis	How You Can Get It	Can It Last a Long Time (Chronic)?	Can It Be Cured?	Is There a Vaccine?
Hepatitis A	Through contaminated food or water	No , it usually goes away on its own	Yes , the body clears it naturally	Yes , a vaccine protects against it
Hepatitis B	Through blood, sex, or from mother to baby at birth	Yes , it can become long-term	Not yet , but it can be controlled	Yes , a vaccine protects against it
Hepatitis C	Through blood (sharing needles or unsafe medical equipment)	Yes , it can last for years	Yes , there are medications that cure it	No , but it can be treated
Hepatitis D	Only if you already have hepatitis B	Yes , it can cause severe liver damage	In study , but being treated for hepatitis B can help	In study , but the hepatitis B vaccine helps prevent it

Questions to ask your doctor about hepatitis

- Should I get tested for hepatitis A, B, C, or D?
- What type of test will I need to confirm if I have hepatitis?
- If I've been exposed, how soon should I get tested?
- If I have hepatitis, can it be treated or cured in my case?
- What are the latest treatment options available for my type of hepatitis?
- What are the side effects or risks of the medications?
- How long will treatment last?
- Do I need to see a liver specialist (hepatologist)?
- How can I protect my family and close contacts from getting hepatitis?
- Can hepatitis cause liver cancer or cirrhosis?

Liver disease affects 1 in 4 Canadians. From newborns to older adults. It can impact anyone, at any stage of life.

Liver Canada was first established in 1969 out of the passion and concern of a group of business leaders and doctors who believed that liver disease needed a champion. Since then, we've relentlessly driven advancements in research, treatment, and support.

With the help of donors, volunteers, researchers, health professionals, corporate supporters, and community members, we are changing the future of liver health for those living in Canada.

To help fund liver health support services, education and research, visit: liver.ca/ways-to-give.

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