

HEPATITIS C CURE – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

You will need two blood tests to see if you have hepatitis C.

First-The Antibody Test

An antibody test shows that you have had contact with Hepatitis C at some point in your life. Having antibodies to Hepatitis C means that you either;

- have Hepatitis C, **OR**
- had Hepatitis C in the past and have cleared the virus naturally or through treatment.

If you test positive for Hepatitis C antibodies you will need a PCR test to see if you are infected with hepatitis C now. If you test negative, that means that you have never come into contact with hepatitis C.

Having Hepatitis C antibodies does not protect you from contracting Hepatitis C. It is possible for the human body to clear the virus naturally in the first six months of the infection. If this occurs, your body will always have the Hep C antibodies. But this will not stop any future Hep C infection.

Second-The PCR test

A PCR test is a blood test which shows whether or not you are infected with hepatitis C now. This test will either be positive or negative.

- PCR negative means that you do not have the Hepatitis C virus anymore, or
- PCR positive means that you do have Hepatitis C virus present.

Doctors can sometimes call this 'RNA positive' or 'RNA negative'. Having a PCR test is the only way to be 100% sure that you have Hepatitis C or not.

Remember that having a positive antibody test does not always mean you still have Hepatitis C.

What if my test says I am antibody positive, but PCR negative?

That means you don't have Hepatitis C anymore. You had it at some point, and cleared it either naturally or through treatment. You will always have Hepatitis C antibodies, think of it like a marker that Hepatitis C was once there. It cannot transmit Hepatitis C or protect you from any future infection.

What if the PCR test comes back positive?

If the test comes back positive, this means you still have Hepatitis C. Talk to your GP about the next step towards a cure.

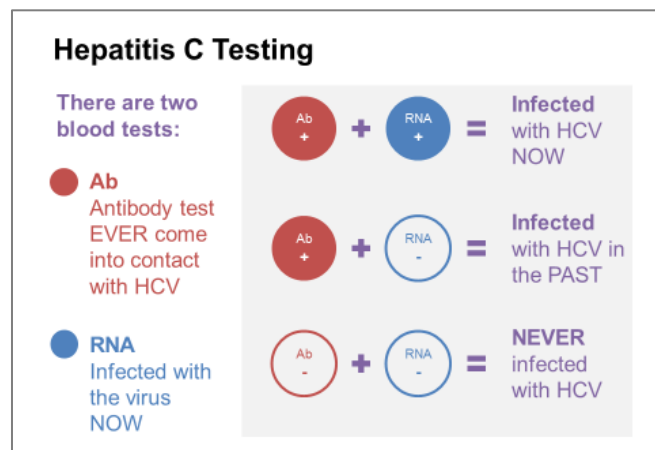


Image courtesy of ASHM

What happens next?

Next your GP will perform further blood tests to find out your viral load and your genotype:

- A PCR viral load test will show the how much virus is in your blood.

- A genotype test is performed when you are going to start treatment and the GP will decide which treatment you should go on.

Is there a cure?

This treatment has a 95% cure rate. It is easy to take, usually by taking one pill a day for 12 weeks.

Can people who currently inject drugs or drink alcohol access the new treatment?

Yes, people who currently drink alcohol or use drugs can access treatment. If you inject, consider starting treatment with your partner or friends to reduce the chance of getting Hepatitis C again. For more information about accessing treatment in a NSP contact QuIHN on 1800 172 076.

How much will treatment cost?

You will only be charged the usual co-payment to fill a prescription. This is \$39.50 or \$6.40 for people with a health care card (as of January 2018).

How do I fill my script for treatment?

Pharmacies in the community now dispense hepatitis C treatment scripts written by GPs. Not all pharmacies will have these medications in stock, so allow plenty of time before you start. Try to fill your scripts at the same pharmacy each time to ensure they are no delays in filling your script. If you are being treated by a liver specialist use a hospital pharmacy, as they can keep your script on hand.

Where can I get treatment?

There are options for treatment in the community many of which are drug user and prisoner friendly services. These include:

- Hepatitis Queensland's HEPnav directory at www.hepqld.asn.au/directory
- GP's can also now treat for Hep C

- Kombi Clinic www.facebook.com/HepCKombi
- QuIHN (QLD Injectors Health Network) is treating people who use drugs, or have a history of using drugs in Brisbane; Gold Coast; Sunshine Coast and Townsville. Contact QuIHN on 07 3620 8111
- Sexual Health Clinics
- Alcohol and Drug Services
- Aboriginal Medical Services
- Liver clinics still provide treatment, especially people with cirrhosis.

Interested in finding out more?

If you are living with hepatitis C and have a question, call Hepatitis QLD InfoLine on 1800 HEP ABC (1800 437 222) or email info@hepqld.asn.au

Clinicians

- View the Australian recommendations for management of hepatitis C virus infection: a consensus statement 2017 and view the GP algorithm see www.gesa.org.au
- For education visit www.ashm.org.au