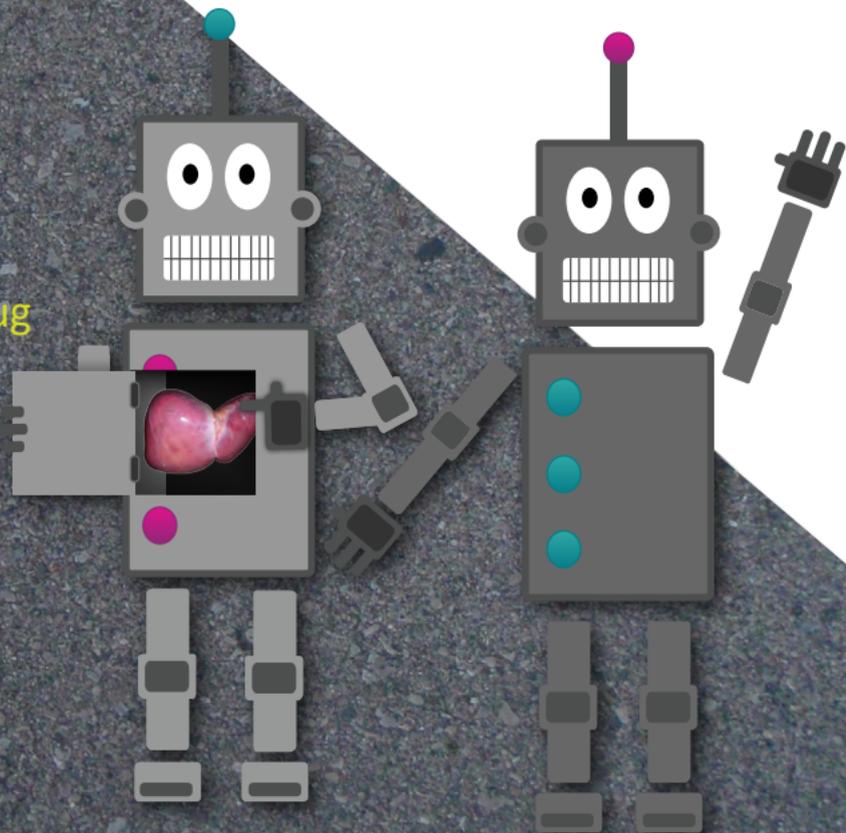


The Hep C

Handbook

The goods on Hep C, safer drug use, tattooing and piercing



What is Hepatitis C?

Hepat (liver) + *itis* (inflammation) = *hepatitis*

Hepatitis C (or Hep C) is a virus carried in the blood. Every year, hepatitis C is passed to 8,000 Canadians, mostly through drug use. Many of the people who get Hep C are youth. When untreated, hepatitis C can cause serious liver damage.

This is a problem because the liver is the largest internal organ we have; it helps us fight infections, cleans poisons from the blood and does other important things. We can't live without it.

This handbook is about Hep C, how it's passed between people, and how to reduce the risk of that happening.

In Canada, the most common types of hepatitis are Hep A, B and C. Hepatitis A and B both have vaccines. Hepatitis C does not. But there are treatment options for people living with hepatitis C.

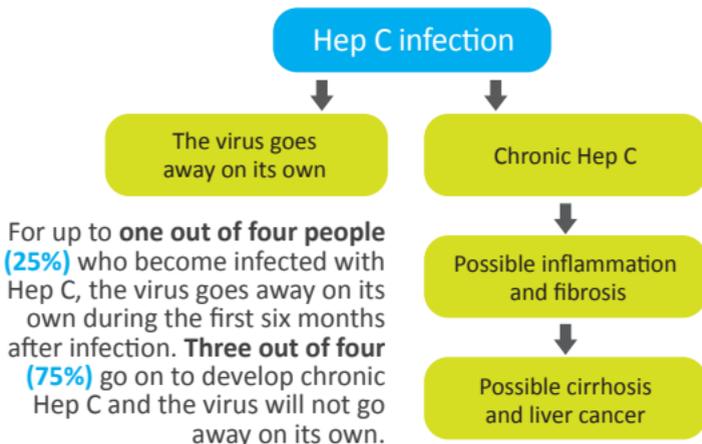
Signs and symptoms

Most people with Hep C don't show signs they have it. Any signs they might have go away in a short time. If people have hepatitis C, they may not know they have the virus until serious liver damage has happened.

Stages of liver damage

Without treatment, damage to the liver gets worse over time. This can take 20 or 30 years.

These are the stages of liver damage:



How does Hep C pass between people?

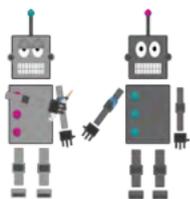
It only takes a small amount of blood to transmit Hep C. The virus can live outside of the body in open air for up to four days; for example, on a razor. It can survive for weeks in the blood that can collect inside a syringe.



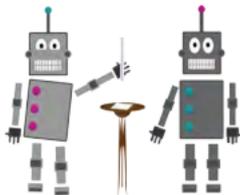
How can Hep C get into the bloodstream?

- needle hole
- fissures (tiny tears that happen in the mouth, nose, vagina, tip of the penis and the ass)
- cuts
- burns or sores on the lips and mouth

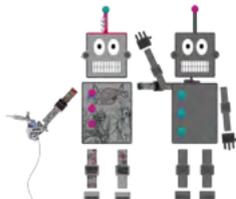
Risk Activities



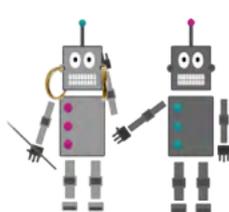
Sharing needles



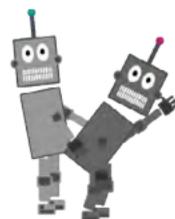
Sharing pipes, straws
or bills



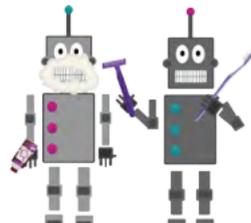
Sharing tattooing
equipment



Sharing piercing
needles



Rough unprotected
sex (anal, vaginal, fisting)



Sharing razors
or toothbrushes

To reduce the risk of passing Hep C:

- Always use new drug equipment (for example: needles, water, filters, cookers, ties, crack/meth pipes and bills/straws).
- Always use new or properly sterilized equipment for body art (for example: tattoos, piercing and branding).
- Practice safer sex by using condoms for oral, vaginal and anal sex and gloves for fisting.
- Avoid sharing toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers or other personal hygiene products that may have tiny amounts of blood on them.

Hep C *CANNOT* be passed by:

- casual contact like hugging, kissing, shaking hands or using the same toilet seat as someone living with Hep C
- sneezing/coughing
- sharing utensils and cups

Hep C can also be passed from a parent to a child during childbirth.

Safer drug use

Hep C is most often passed between people who use drugs. So whenever using, it's important to be as safe as possible.

Safer injecting

Injecting can be safer when you inject yourself properly. If others inject you, you might have less control over being safer. Ask a nurse, friend or someone you trust to show you how to inject yourself, and follow these helpful tips:

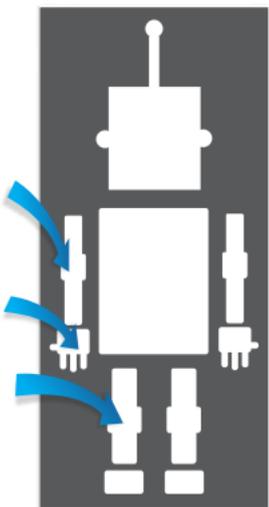
When injecting: You want to protect your core and head.

Where to inject:

Arms: Upper and lower arms are the safest.

Hands: Hands take longer to heal than arms, and will hurt more and more over time.

Legs: Inject slowly. The legs are more likely to get clots.



Where to avoid:

X **Head/face/neck:** Are the most dangerous and should be avoided.

X **Groin/thighs:** Risky and best to avoid.

X **Feet:** Ok, but will hurt and area is more likely to become infected.

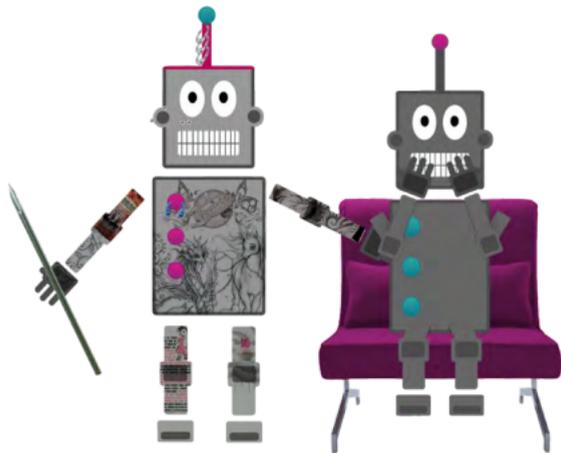
Injecting can cause infections or sores. If you notice that you have sores developing where you inject, get them checked out by a nurse or keep them covered so that they don't get worse. To help them heal, use a different injection site.

When injecting, make sure to put your used needles and equipment into a sharps bin. You can make one out of any hard plastic container like a pop bottle.

Safer smoking

Smoking drugs can cause your lips to crack or burn, which can allow someone else's blood to get into your body.

- To be safer, you should have your own pipe. If you have to share, get your own mouthpiece and don't share it with others. Mark your pipe with markers, string, an elastic band or lipstick so you know it's yours.
- Use Chapstick or Vaseline on your lips to keep them from cracking and burning.
- Allow the pipe to cool before using it again.



Safer snorting

When snorting drugs, be sure to take good care of your nose.

- To be safer, you should use your own straws or bills. Mark them with markers, string, an elastic band or lipstick so you know they're yours.
- Snorting can irritate the inside of the nose. It is better to rinse out your nose before and after snorting, using a little bit of water. Sniffing the water can help you move the drugs along your nasal passage.

Safer tattoos & piercings

To be as safe as possible, look for:

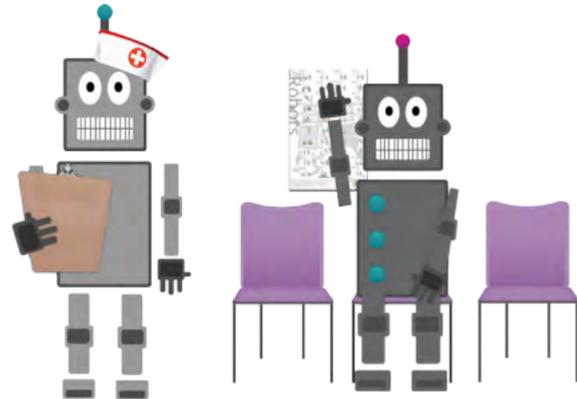
- a studio that is clean, with covered work surfaces
- an artist that is informed about Hep C and HIV
- single-use needles, razors and ink
- new packaged sterilized medical-grade steel jewelry

Getting tested for Hep C

- Getting tested is the only way we can know if we have Hep C. Hep C tests are able to tell if someone has the virus by looking for Hep C antibodies in the bloodstream. It can take a few months for the test results to be accurate.
- If this first test is positive, then a second test has to be done. This second test makes sure that the virus is definitely present.
- Testing is available at youth clinics, sexual health clinics, doctors' offices, as well as public health units and health centres.

We can still live a long time with hepatitis C if we show our livers and bodies lots of love, by:

- using less (for example: alcohol, drugs, cigarettes).
- sleeping well and often.
- decreasing stress. For advice on what might work best for you, talk to a friend or local service provider.
- eating healthy foods (for example: having as many fruits and vegetables as possible).
- exercising and staying active.
- finding and keeping medical treatments that work best for you.



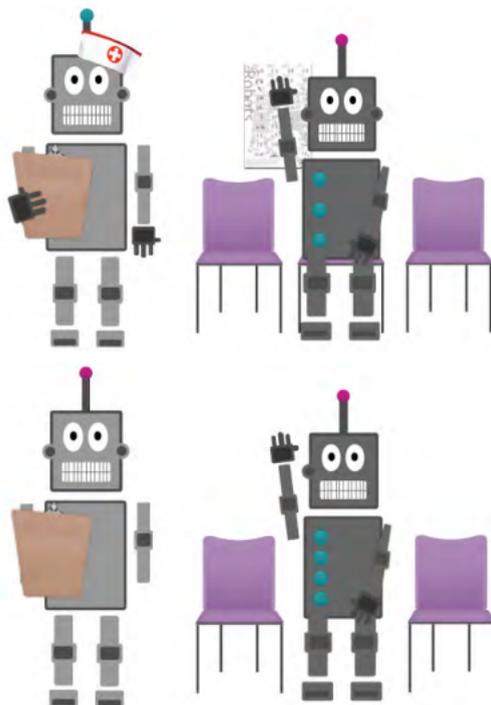


Liver Love Word Search

S E H V U C Q D Y Q A B F C Q Z
 W N O A C O V A D R L I O F H U
 I X V D S N R R M O S O V F D V
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 Y Z B E P I P R J L P Z W F E C

Piercing	Treatment	Hepatitis C	Condom	Cuts
Fissures	Virus	Blood	Cookers	Legs
Tattoo	Testing	Liver	Sex	Hands
Razor	Pipe	Needles	Filters	Arms

spot 8 things that are different between the two pictures



Want to learn more about HIV and hepatitis C?

www.catie.ca • 1-800-263-1638

www.youthco.org • 1-855-YOUTHCO (968-8426)

CATIE ORDERING CENTRE NO: ATI-30059 (AUSSI DISPONIBLE EN FRANÇAIS, ATI-30060) PRINTED WITH ASSISTANCE FROM CATIE, 2013.

design: Brian Futter

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Special thanks to The Klinik and Queen West Community Health Centre for providing community review.