

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) Disease Backgrounder

FAST FACTS:

- Hepatitis C virus (HCV) has become a serious public health issue around the world and is considered a 'viral time bomb'¹ by the World Health Organization due to its high prevalence, long term unpredictable disease progression, aging population, and low diagnosis and treatment rates
- Approximately 15-25% of those infected with HCV will naturally clear the virus from their body; 70-90% will develop chronic infection²
- Approximately 150 million people globally are living with HCV,³ however many are unaware of their infection³
- HCV can cause severe liver problems, including liver cancer and cirrhosis. In fact, approximately 76% of all liver cancers are a direct result of HCV infection²

What is hepatitis C (HCV)?

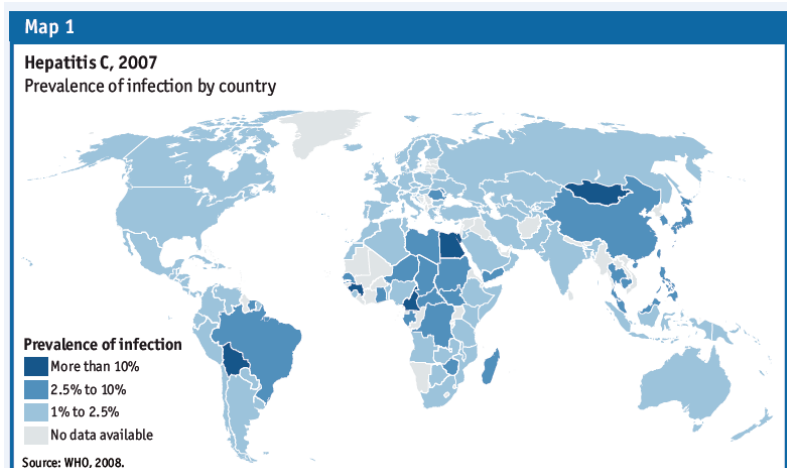
- 'Hepatitis' means inflammation of the liver, and refers to a group of viral infections that affect the liver
- The most common types are hepatitis A, B, and C. While there are vaccines available to prevent hepatitis A and B, there is currently no available vaccine for HCV
- HCV is one of the most common viral liver diseases; it has six identified genotypes and more than 50 subtypes^{2,4}, with genotype 1 being the most common in many regions including Europe, America, Japan, China, Australia and New Zealand⁵ - and the most difficult to treat²
- While it has always been regarded as a liver disease, HCV is also associated with numerous hematological, renal, dermatologic, rheumatic, autoimmune and brain disorders^{6,7}

What are the consequences of HCV?

- Chronic HCV can result in serious long-term health problems; an estimated 30% of individuals will develop progressive liver disease, including cirrhosis (deterioration and scarring of the liver) and hepatocellular carcinoma (liver cancer)²
- Chronic HCV is the leading cause for liver transplantation²
- Patients with chronic HCV infection are more at risk of developing comorbidities than non-infected patients, including cardiovascular, renal, and central nervous systems conditions⁸

How common is HCV?

- Worldwide, approximately 150 million people are infected with HCV³. To put this into context, approximately 33 million people are living with HIV⁹
- In Western Europe, an estimated 5 million people are infected with HCV⁴ and prevalence tends to be even higher in developing countries, such as North Africa
- The economic burden of HCV is high, largely due to the management of its long-term consequences, including cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver transplantation





Who is at risk?

- HCV infection is spread through blood contact
- Before widespread screening of blood supplies began in 1992, HCV was commonly spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants¹⁰
- Today, most people become infected with HCV by sharing needles or other equipment used to inject drugs¹¹
- Additional populations at risk for contracting HCV include:¹¹
 - Haemodialysis patients
 - People with body piercings and tattoos who may have been exposed to improperly sanitized equipment
 - People sharing personal care items that may have come in contact with another person's blood, such as razors or toothbrushes
 - Children born to mothers who are infected with HCV
 - People who have sexual contact with a person infected with HCV

What are the symptoms of infection?

- People infected with HCV may not experience any obvious symptoms. In fact, most people are unaware for decades that they have contracted HCV¹³
- If symptoms do occur, they can include flu-like symptoms and fatigue¹²
- Other symptoms may include: loss of appetite, muscle or joint pain, nausea, anxiety, depression, difficulty concentrating or dark urine/bright stools¹³
- Approximately 60-80% of people infected with HCV have no symptoms at all¹³

For more information on HCV, please go to <http://www.stop-hepatitis-c.info>.

References

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