



# spotlight on health

## Hepatitis C: What You Should Know

(NAPSA)—Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is the most common, chronic blood-borne infection in the United States, with nearly 4 million Americans (or 2% of the population) infected. The hepatitis C virus can result in a swelling of the liver known as hepatitis C. Hepatitis C is slightly more common among men than women, and while it affects people of all ages, it is most commonly found among those aged 20-39.

Hepatitis C infects the liver, which removes waste products and worn-out cells from the blood. If untreated, hepatitis C can lead to scarring of the liver (known as cirrhosis), cancer of the liver and, in some cases, even death.

The hepatitis C virus is spread through contaminated blood. Hepatitis C is most commonly spread through intravenous drug use, as users often share needles that are contaminated with the virus.

People who had blood transfusions before 1990, when screening blood for HCV began, are also at risk. Tattooing and body piercing may also transmit hepatitis C if dye or needles contaminated with HCV are reused.

Hepatitis C is often referred to as a "silent threat" since a majority of people have no symptoms for many years after they become infected. In fact, more than 70 percent of HCV-infected people have no idea that they are infected.

Symptoms of HCV may include:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite

### Hepatitis C affects 4 million Americans. Are you at risk?

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you may be at risk for hepatitis C, the most common, chronic blood-borne infection in the United States.

- Did you have a blood transfusion or receive a donor organ before 1992?
- Have you ever injected intravenous (IV) drugs, even once?
- Have you ever undergone hemodialysis?
- Have you been exposed to infected blood in the workplace (needlesticks)?
- Have you had multiple sexual partners?
- Do you have a tattoo or body piercing (due to contaminated needles/ink)?

If any of these statements applies to you, please talk to your doctor about testing. 

- Dark urine
- Nausea/stomach pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes).

Hepatitis C is a serious disease, but there are many treatment options which may help infected people get rid of the virus. PEG-INTRON® (Peginterferon alfa-2b) Powder for Injection combined with ribavirin is one such treatment which has been shown to clear HCV from the blood in about half of the people taking this medication. Medical, educational and emotional support are also available for HCV-infected individuals and their families. People being treated with PEG-INTRON® and ribavirin, as well as those considering treatment, can enroll in a free patient support program called The *Be In Charge*® Program. This program offers 24/7 telephone access to a live nurse, many educational materials, and counseling (decisions about med-

ical treatment should always be discussed with a health care professional).

In addition to treatment, there are steps that people with hepatitis C can take to live healthier lives. For instance, studies have shown that avoiding heavy alcohol consumption (defined as five or more drinks per day) can reduce liver damage among people with hepatitis C. Obesity can also contribute to more advanced liver disease, and has been shown to lessen the effectiveness of certain medicines that treat HCV. While a diagnosis of hepatitis C should be taken seriously, taking control by seeking treatment, making healthy lifestyle changes, and getting appropriate support can help make HCV a manageable disease.

To learn more about hepatitis C, visit <http://allaboutthepatitis.com>. For more information on PEG-INTRON®, visit [www.pegintron.com](http://www.pegintron.com).