



**University Hospitals Birmingham**  
NHS Foundation Trust



**Building healthier lives**

UHB is a no smoking Trust

## Contact details for the Hepatitis Specialist Nurses

The team of Hepatitis Nurse Specialist's, are based at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. They lead the hepatitis C treatment clinic for hospital patients in the outpatient area 2, (subwait 4), at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. They also attend clinics in various community settings, including a Community Van clinic and in HMP Birmingham prison.

Please call the nursing team for any advice or further information regarding hepatitis C or treatment for hepatitis C.

### Contact details:

0121 371 4600	Lisa Ellis
0121 371 4599	Gemma Botterill
0121 371 4603	Jennifer Kearney/ Mara Niga and Zoe Jennings
0121 371 4601	Sally Bufton

Some of the information in this leaflet has been taken from the Hep C Trust website.

## About Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus that predominantly infects the cells of the liver. This can result in inflammation and significant damage to the liver. It can also affect the liver's ability to perform its essential functions. The virus can only be transmitted by infected blood.

There are 6 major variations of hepatitis C virus, labelled 1 to 6. These are known as 'genotypes'. Different genotypes predominate in different parts of the world. One genotype cannot change into another. However, it is possible, although rare, to be infected with more than one genotype at the same time.

Hepatitis C infection can be categorised into two stages. The first stage is acute infection (following initial infection). The second stage is chronic infection. The acute stage refers to the first 6 months of

infection and does not necessarily result in any noticeable symptoms. Approximately 20% of those infected with hepatitis C will naturally clear the virus from their body within the first six months. For the remaining 80% a chronic (long-term) infection will develop.

The course of a chronic hepatitis C infection is extremely varied and unpredictable. Some people experience very few symptoms for decades. Others can suffer symptoms almost from the start. Some will progress over decades to develop fibrosis and cirrhosis (extensive scarring) of the liver, liver cancer or liver failure. Many others experience very little liver damage despite years of infection. In cases where there is an absence of symptoms, many people do not discover that they have HCV, until sometime after they have been infected.

## How you might get Hepatitis C

- Using/sharing drug paraphernalia/crack pipes/snorting tubes
- Tattoos and piercings
- Razors and toothbrushes
- Hairdressers and barbers (street barbers abroad)
- Needle stick injury
- Sexual contact- (anal sex has a higher risk)
- Blood and blood products (prior to 1992)
- Medical and dental treatment abroad
- Vaccinations as a child abroad
- From mother passed to her baby
- Haemodialysis

## Testing

Two tests need to be done to discover if you have hepatitis C

- Antibody test, which establishes if you have been exposed to the hepatitis C virus
- PCR test which establishes whether the virus is still active and needs treating

The tests will mostly be done from a quick finger prick test called a Dry Blood Spot Test (DBST). Occasionally a venous blood test is needed. The two tests can be done from one blood sample, which means you only need to provide the sample once. However, some services will perform one test and then call you back for a further blood sample.

It is important to know that there is a 'window period'. This is a short period of time when your immune system may not have had time to produce anti bodies. It usually takes between 6 and 12 weeks for these anti bodies to develop. However, in a few people it can take up to six months. So if you have a test within the window period and the result is negative, it does not necessarily mean that you don't have the virus.

If you have a positive hepatitis C anti body test it does not necessarily mean you are currently infected. Up to 20% of people clear the virus from their bodies naturally. This is called 'spontaneous clearance'. Although they have cleared the virus, blood tests will still show the presence of hepatitis C antibodies. There is a chance that you may have been infected with hepatitis C in the past, but you are no longer infected.

## Treatment for Hepatitis C

The treatment for hepatitis C is with tablet medication only. The type of medication that you receive will depend on a few factors:

What type or genotype of Hepatitis C you have.

How damaged or not your liver is (a fibroscan or blood tests will provide this information)

The decision is then made by a team of specialists that includes, specialist doctors in Hepatitis, specialist hepatitis nurses and a pharmacist.

## The names of the drugs are:

Harvoni  
Epclusa  
Zepatier  
Maviret  
Vosevi  
Ribavirin

You will be given separate information by your nurse on the drug or drug combination that you are due to be treated with.

The treatment length will vary depending on which drug you receive, but will range from 8 weeks, 12 weeks or 16 weeks in total.

## Avoidance of pregnancy while you are on hepatitis C treatment

When taking your hepatitis C tablets, you should always ensure that you use 2 forms of contraception to prevent any pregnancy. This is because any child that may be conceived could develop foetal abnormalities and this is best to be avoided. This is not just applicable to women but to men also. It is recommended that men do not sire children while taking anti virals.

## Remaining healthy when on treatment

### Reduction of alcohol

When on treatment for hepatitis C, you should give up alcohol or at least reduce the amount you are drinking. We do not know if the use of alcohol will interfere with your hepatitis C treatment. For help in doing this, there are a few telephone lines that you may find helpful as well as discussing with your own GP. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Helpline: **0845 917 7650** or Drinkline on **0300 123 1110**

## Exercise

When you are on the hepatitis C tablet treatment, you will remain tired. However, we suggest that you continue to exercise when you are on treatment, rather than stopping exercise altogether. You may start to put on weight if you do not get any exercise at all.

## Smoking

It is always beneficial to your health if you can stop smoking. If you are not able to do this when you are taking your hepatitis C treatment, then it is worth cutting down when you have completed treatment. You can always discuss with your GP about nicotine patches or use an alternative like, the electronic vapour pipes which are much less harmful to your health. There are a few telephone lines that you may want to call for further advice: NHS Smoking Helpline on **0800 022 4332** or Action on Addiction Tel: **0300 330 0659**

## Diet and Nutrition

Always ensure you take in a good diet. For patients who have excess weight, their liver can also be damaged through too much fat in the liver, which is mainly related to health lifestyles like what you are eating. Foods high in fat or sugar can cause fat in the liver.

We do not suggest and there is no specific diet for patients with hepatitis C, we just advise a normal diet, including fruit and vegetables. For those with small diets or who do not feel like eating, small portions and eating more frequently may be helpful

## When do you know if treatment has worked?

Occasionally the treatment is unsuccessful. The virus is nearly always undetectable at the end of your treatment. Sometimes, it relapses, typically during the 12 weeks after completion of treatment. If the virus remains undetectable at that time point, then we are sure that you are cured.

We will need you to provide a blood sample so that we can tell you the result. Current treatments give a cure chance of more than 90%.

## Reinfection risks for picking up hepatitis C

Please be aware that if you have been informed that you are now cured of hepatitis C, this does not give you any future immunity or protection against hepatitis C and you could get re-infected if you come into contact with another person's infected blood. Please always be mindful of this and reduce the risks as much as possible.

### The types of reinfection risks include:

Sharing of needles

Sexual contact

Sharing toothbrushes and razors

Medical and dental treatment abroad, including Heamodialysis

## Prevention and harm reduction

As hepatitis C is acquired through infected blood, it is always worth while encouraging your family members and partners to get tested. This is best done through their own GP service.

If you have received hepatitis C treatment and have been told that you are cured, it is best to always keep your personal items like toothbrushes and razors strictly for your own use.

Always avoid any sharing of needles, snorting pipes or tubes, if you take any recreational drugs.

Safe sexual practices should be adhered and use of condoms will prevent sexual transmission of hepatitis C or other infections.

# Welfare advice

## Transport

For any patient attending the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for clinic appointments, if you are on benefits you may be able to claim transport or petrol costs. This is arranged on an individual basis only, as not all patients will be on the same benefits. Please ask one of the nurses or contact them on the telephone numbers at the top of this leaflet if you require further information on this.

For patients attending community clinics, please ask your key drug worker for more information on transport to clinic.

## Depression

For patients who may suffer with depression, anxiety, low mood, you may want to contact Birmingham Healthy Minds on **0121 301 2525** or 'text' BHM to **60777**, and you will get a call back. They can provide free and confidential support.

## Available support systems and telephone helplines:

### Hepatitis C Trust

**0845 223 4424 or 020 7089 6221**

Open 10.30 am to 4.30 pm Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays and over the Christmas break, when dates and times may vary)

For patients attending Scala House in Birmingham, the Hepatitis C Trust also provide support from a “buddy” to help patients attend their clinic appointment or give general advice and support about treatment.

### British Liver Trust

The British Liver Trust Helpline offers information and publications to everyone affected by a liver condition. Please call **0800 652 7330** between 10.00 am and 3 pm (Monday to Friday) or e-mail: [helpline@britishlivertrust.org.uk](mailto:helpline@britishlivertrust.org.uk)

### Reach Out Recovery

**0121 227 5890**

[Birmingham.info@cgl.org.uk](mailto:Birmingham.info@cgl.org.uk)

### Action on Addiction

Tel: **0300 330 0659**

A registered charity with treatment centres throughout England.

### National Drugs Helpline (FRANK)

**0300 123 6600**

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

For confidential information, advice and counselling

## NHS Smoking Helpline

**0300 123 1044**

Advice for people wanting to give up smoking

[www.Smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.Smokefree.nhs.uk)

## Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Helpline: **0845 917 7650**

Calls charged at a local rate and automatically transferred to an AA member in your area

[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

## Drinkline

**0300 123 1110**

Free confidential national helpline that also provides information and advice relating to alcohol issues

## Narcotics Anonymous

Helpline **0300 999 1212**

12 step fellowship. Meetings held all over the country

[www.ukna.org](http://www.ukna.org)

## Cocaine Anonymous

Tel: **0800 612 0225**

12 step fellowship

[www.cauk.org.uk](http://www.cauk.org.uk)

## Samaritans

Tel: Freephone Number **0300 123 1044**

A charitable organisation that runs a telephone Helpline that anyone can call at anytime of the day or night

Birmingham Samaritans: **0330 094 5717**

## CGL Drug and Alcohol Service

**0121 227 5890**

## Central and West Hub

255 Hospital Street  
Newtown  
Birmingham B19 2YF

## East HUB

111 Church Lane  
Stechford B33 9EJ

## North Hub

Office 1, Patrick Drive  
Shady Lane  
Great Barr B44 9ED

## South Hub

The Lodge, Woodbrooke  
1046 Bristol Road  
Selly Oak B29 6LJ

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email **[patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk)**.

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