



Screening the Only Way to Detect Hepatitis C ...Have You Been Checked? *By Grace Yu, MD*

Hepatitis C is an infection caused by the hepatitis C virus. Most people infected with this virus have chronic, life-long infection even though they do not exhibit symptoms. Chronic hepatitis C infection causes chronic liver inflammation which can lead to liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer. It is the number one reason for liver transplant. Hepatitis C can be treated with antiviral therapy. With the advance in science, the newer antiviral therapies have higher cure rate, shorter treatment duration and much better tolerability compared to the older treatment options.

Hepatitis C is most commonly transmitted through blood products and contaminated needles or equipment. Infrequently, it can also be transmitted sexually or from an infected mother to her child through the birthing process.

Since most people with chronic hepatitis C do not have symptoms until the disease is in an advanced stage, the only way find out early if a person has been infected with hepatitis C is through screening.

Center of Disease Control (CDC) has recommended hepatitis C screening for

people who are at high risk, including those who:

- were born in the Unites States between 1945 and 1965
- ever injected illegal drugs
- received clotting factors before 1987
- received blood/ organs before July 1992
- were ever on chronic hemodialysis
- have evidence of liver disease
- are infected with HIV

People who were born between 1945 to 1965 (baby boomers) are at higher risk for chronic hepatitis C. Up to 75% of adults infected with Hepatitis C in the Unites States were born from 1945 to 1965 and baby boomers are five times more likely to have Hepatitis C than other adults. There is no clear reason for this. It is may be partly due to contact with contaminated

medical equipment or transfusion of blood products from infected donor before universal precaution and screening were implemented. However, many people infected with hepatics C cannot identify an inciting event.

Screening for hepatitis C can be done easily by checking your blood for the antibody to the hepatitis C virus. A non-reactive test result means you have not been exposed to hepatitis C. However, a reactive test result does not necessary mean you have hepatitis C infection. False positive test results can occur and a positive test needs additional testing to confirm the true presence of this disease.

For people who do not have an ongoing risk of hepatitis C, such as those who were born between 1945 and 1965 with no other risk factors, one time screening to rule out the infection is sufficient.

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