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Health Department

FACTS & details

about Sedgwick County Government

Hepatitis C

April 2008

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). It is estimated 4.1 million (1.6%) Americans have been infected with HCV; 3.2 million are chronically infected.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C?

Symptoms and progression of the disease differ between individuals. Approximately 80% of all newly infected individuals experience no symptoms, making it uncommon for them to be diagnosed. Fifteen to twenty-five percent of all cases recover; the remainder progress to a chronic stage. Most individuals do not have symptoms for 10-20 years. Symptoms that do appear include: fatigue, headaches, joint aches, muscle aches, nausea, jaundice, loss of appetite, and/or abdominal pain.

How soon do symptoms appear after infection occurs?

Symptoms usually appear 2 weeks to 6 months after infection occurs.

How long is Hepatitis C contagious?

Infectiousness with HCV varies from person-to-person. Those who test positive for HCV antibodies should be considered contagious.

How is Hepatitis C spread?

Transmission occurs when blood from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected. HCV is spread through sharing needles or "shooting" drugs. It can also be spread through needle sticks or sharps exposures on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth.

How is Hepatitis C treated?

There is not specific therapy for acute cases (short, brief cases that disappear on their own). Chronic (long-lasting) Hepatitis C can be treated with medication (interferon with or without ribavirin). This treatment results in elimination of the virus in 20-40% of those receiving a full 6-12 months of treatment. These medications have significant side effects and require careful monitoring.

How can you prevent Hepatitis C?

There is no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C. Here are some ways to prevent infection:

- Do not shoot drugs. If you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program and never share drugs, needles, and syringes.
- Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A & B.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- If you are a health care or public safety worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- If you are having sex, especially with more than one partner, use latex condoms correctly and every time you have sex.
- If you are HCV positive, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.

For more information:

Call 660-7392
Or visit the Sedgwick County
website at www.sedgwickcounty.org.