

HEPATITIS C IN CHILDREN

What is hepatitis C (HCV)?

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a disease that is caused by a virus that infects the liver. HCV can cause serious liver damage (cirrhosis, or buildup of scarring) if it is in the body for a long period of time. Most people with HCV do not have symptoms.

Hepatitis C is contagious through transmission by exposure of blood from an infected person. The most common way children get hepatitis C is through the birthing process when the mother has the virus. It can also be transmitted if blood from any infected person enters the bloodstream of the child through unhealed cuts and sharing hygiene items like razors and toothbrushes.

How is HCV diagnosed

HCV is diagnosed through blood tests that will indicate if the child has been exposed to the virus as well as if the virus is still present in the body. Testing may or may not be recommended during the first 18 months of a baby's life.

Treating HCV

If children contract HCV at birth, their immune systems may successfully fight the virus off without medical treatment within the first two years of life. If the virus has not cleared within that timeframe, then it is important to discuss treatment for the child to prevent liver damage over time. Doctors will take a child's age, HCV genotype (virus variations), and overall health into consideration when determining a treatment plan.

Other Considerations

It is important for children with HCV to eat a healthy diet and avoid being overweight or obese. These conditions can increase a hepatitis C positive child's chances of developing insulin resistance (usually associated with diabetes mellitus, also known as type 2 diabetes). Having insulin resistance can increase one's chance of fibrosis (scarring of the liver).

To learn more about hepatitis C in children, scan the QR code below. For a complete list of all of our free resources, please visit:
liverfoundation.org/resource-center.

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For questions about liver wellness and disease, or for emotional support to patients at the point of crisis and information on local resources including physician referrals, please contact our Helpline at 1-800-465-4837.

