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# HCV and HIV

## Testing can save lives

HCV and HIV are 2 viruses that can cause serious problems. You can be infected and not even know it. Knowing whether you have either one of these viruses is important. That's because the virus can be causing harm even when you don't have symptoms. But if you know you have the virus, you can get treated. That can prevent symptoms and maybe even save your life. It can also lower the chance that you will infect someone else.

You can easily be tested for these viruses. You just need to have a sample of your blood drawn.

## HCV

### What is HCV?

HCV stands for hepatitis C virus. It causes a liver disease called hepatitis C. About 20% of the time, the virus will go away on its own.<sup>1</sup> The other 80% of the time, the infection becomes chronic.<sup>1</sup> It can last a lifetime. Even when there are no signs of it, HCV can be slowly damaging your liver. That's why HCV is a leading cause of liver transplants. It can also cause liver cancer.

### How is HCV spread?

HCV is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of an uninfected person. In the United States, people used to get hepatitis C from blood transfusions, organ transplants, or blood products used to treat clotting problems. It's very, very unlikely to get hepatitis C from these things now. That's because they are tested for HCV before being given to people.

Today, HCV is spread mainly by:

- Sharing needles or other equipment when injecting drugs
- Getting tattoos or body piercings with needles that are not sterile
- Accidentally getting stuck by a needle that was used on a person with HCV
- Being born to a mother with hepatitis C



## What baby boomers should know about HCV

- Many baby boomers are infected and don't know it.
- They are 5 times more likely than other people to have HCV.<sup>5</sup>
- HCV often causes a "silent" infection with no signs or symptoms.
- Most HCV infections last a lifetime if they're not treated.
- HCV can lead to serious liver disease and even death.
- Treatment can cure up to 75% of infections.<sup>4</sup>
- CDC recommends HCV testing for all baby boomers.

## You are at risk of getting HIV if you:

- Have sex with someone who has HIV
- Have multiple sex partners
- Inject drugs and share equipment, including needles
- Are born to a mother with HIV
- Accidentally get stuck with a needle or other sharp object contaminated with HIV
- Receive blood transfusions, blood products, or organ/tissue transplants that are contaminated with HIV (extremely rare)

### All baby boomers should get tested for HCV

Not everyone gets tested for HCV. In the past only those at risk got the test. In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) changed that. They said that all baby boomers should also be tested.<sup>2</sup> These are people who were born from 1945 to 1965.

About 3 million Americans have an HCV infection.<sup>3</sup> Most of them are baby boomers who don't even know they have it. Many of them were infected a long time ago. Now that they are getting older, some of them are starting to die from it. But treatment might save their lives. New drugs can cure up to 75% of infected people.<sup>4</sup> This is why the CDC says all baby boomers should get tested for HCV.

### HIV

#### What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that infects the immune system. Once people are infected with HIV, they can't get rid of the infection. That means that once you have the infection, you have it for life.

HIV can hide for a long time in your body. It attacks cells in your immune system. Your immune system protects you from infections and diseases. HIV can destroy so much of your body's immune system that it can no longer fight infections. When that happens, HIV infection can lead to AIDS, the final stage of HIV infection.

#### You can be infected with HIV and not know it

More than 1 million people in the United States are infected with HIV.<sup>6</sup> Many of them don't know it. This means they are not getting treatment. It also means they may be giving the virus to other people. About 50,000 people get infected with HIV each year.<sup>6</sup> And half of them get infected from people who don't know they are infected.

#### Why should you be tested for HIV?

The CDC recommends that all adults be tested for HIV. Testing can tell you if you are infected. If you are, you can get treated. This can allow you to have a long and healthy life. It can help decrease the risk of infecting your sex partner. It can also help decrease the risk of infecting your baby if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

This year the CDC recommended a new way to test for HIV.<sup>7</sup> The new way uses a blood specimen just like the old way. But the new way can detect HIV earlier. This means you can be treated earlier.

### References

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