

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a virus that can damage the liver. HCV is blood-borne, which means that the virus is spread by infected blood that enters the body through the eyes, nose, mouth, or breaks in the skin. It is the most common chronic blood-borne infection in the U.S. The virus may take a long time to damage the liver, sometimes between 20 and 30 years. Most people infected with HCV live with it for the rest of their lives.

You are at higher risk for HCV if you:

- Received a blood transfusion, blood products or organ transplant prior to 1992.
- Use injection drugs, especially if you share needles or “works”.

Statistics for hepatitis C indicate that up to 2% of any population is infected with the hepatitis C virus. Butte County, therefore, would have about 4,000 people with hepatitis C many of whom do not know they have the disease; all of whom would benefit by medical care.

Since 1992 the national blood supply has been screened for hepatitis C and is extremely low risk to recipients. Currently, injection drug needle sharers are among the highest risk group for contracting hepatitis C. Other sources of blood exposure also contribute to transmission. In 10% of hepatitis C patients no known source of exposure has been identified.

To be tested for HCV, make an appointment with your regular doctor. Testing is covered under most health insurance plans, including Medi-Cal and Medicare. If you do not have health insurance, low-cost testing is available at Butte County Public Health Clinics.

Prevention includes not sharing items contaminated with blood such as toothbrushes, nail clippers, and body piercing items; tattooing only at professional parlors; not sharing drug paraphernalia, and using blood barriers such as condoms and gloves.