

## Hepatitis C Myth Buster

Although highly effective tablet-only treatments for Hepatitis C with cure rates of over 95% are available on the NHS there are a number of common misconceptions or myths we regularly hear. These myths may be stopping people from accessing treatment or continuing to act in ways that put them at risk of infection so it's important we bust them wide open!

**"I've heard the treatment is really long, has loads of injections and makes you feel more unwell"**

Not anymore! All of the Hep C treatments now available are 1-3 tablets a day for only 8-12 weeks. These treatments have minimal side effects and over 95% cure rates! Gone are the days of interferon injections so now really is the time to get tested, treated and cured.

**"I've been told that I can't get treatment"**

There used to be a lot of restrictions on who could have their Hepatitis C infection treated. This all changed with the introduction of new direct acting treatments in 2015, which means anyone can now be considered for treatment. Even if you're still actively injecting, snorting, smoking or drinking alcohol you could still be eligible for treatment so get a test today!

**"It's ok, I've had all my vaccinations for Hep C"**

Unlike Hepatitis B you **can't be vaccinated for Hepatitis C**. Even if you clear the infection you can still become re-infected so it's important to keep yourself safe! On the plus side hepatitis C can easily be cured so get tested, treated and cured today!

**'I've always used my own needle/ never shared a needle'**

Even if you've always used your own Needles you can still becoming infected by sharing other equipment such as syringes, water, filters or spoons. If you are intravenously injecting drugs and sharing any injecting equipment, you can expose yourself and others to infection with hepatitis C - even if you are using a new needle. Any equipment that has been used before could still have invisible drops of blood attached to it. The best way to avoid transmitting the disease is to use new syringes, new needles, a clean spoon, sterile water and a new filter.

## **“I don’t need a test because I’ve never injected drugs”**

Although injecting drug use is usually considered the biggest risk factor for Hep C infection it’s definitely not the only one:

- Sharing other drug paraphernalia such as needle or straws
- Time spent in prison
- Periods of homelessness
- Unprotected anal sex
- Unsterilized equipment (hairdressers, barbers, tattoos, piercings)
- Blood transfusions before 1992

If any of these risk factors relate to you it’s important you get tested for Hepatitis C and other blood borne viruses (BBVs)

## **“I’ve had lots of blood tests in the past at the hospital - Surely they would have picked it up there!”**

Unfortunately hepatitis C tests are not always requested when you have bloods taken at hospital. If you feel you’re at risk of infection it’s important to speak to your GP or other health or social care professionals to request a test.

## **“I’ve got the antibodies. So this means I’m immune”**

Unlike Hepatitis B you can never be immune from catching Hepatitis C. Even if you have antibodies you can still become infected. It’s therefore really important to keep yourself safe and minimise your risks as much as possible.

## **“I’ve been told I have the most aggressive strain”**

There are 6 recognised genotypes of hepatitis C with some evidence showing that genotype 3 might cause liver disease to progress more quickly. The good news is all of these genotypes can be cured with the direct acting treatments so now is the time to get tested, treated and cured!

## **“I feel fine so it’s not affecting me”**

About half the people with the virus don't know they're infected because they have no signs of infection. It can sometimes take years for any to show up. Even if you’re not showing any symptoms and feel fine the virus could still be causing serious damage to your liver. If you don’t get treated this

could eventually develop into serious liver disease or even cancer so now is the time to get tested, treated and cured!

### **“I don’t need treatment until I start to feel unwell”**

Just because you feel well now doesn’t mean the hepatitis C virus isn’t causing damage to your liver. It can sometimes take years for any severe symptoms to show up. Waiting until you feel unwell could cause irreversible damage to your liver or even cancer. If you believe you have hepatitis C it’s important you get treated and cured as soon as possible.

### **“I need to stop drinking and using before I can have treatment”**

Not anymore! There used to be a lot of restrictions on who could have their Hepatitis C infection treated. This all changed with the introduction of new direct acting treatments in 2015, which means anyone can now be considered for treatment. Even if you’re still actively injecting, snorting, smoking or drinking alcohol you could still be eligible for treatment so get a test today!

### **“I feel too unwell to do treatment”**

The direct acting treatments have minimal side effects and no longer require repeat injections of interferon. A number of people begin to feel better after only a few weeks of treatment so now really is the time to get hep C free!

### **“I was tested when I had my baby”**

Unfortunately hepatitis C tests are not routinely requested during pregnancy screenings. They will usually test for Hepatitis B, HIV and Syphilis but not hepatitis C. If you feel you’re at risk of infection it’s important to speak to your GP or other health or social care professionals to request a test for hepatitis C.