# Hepatitis A, B, and C: Learn the Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hepatitis A</th>
<th>Hepatitis B</th>
<th>Hepatitis C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV)</td>
<td>caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV)</td>
<td>caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV)</td>
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**How is it spread?**

- Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is found in the feces of people with hepatitis A and is usually spread by close personal contact (including sex or sharing a household). It can also be spread by eating food or drinking water contaminated with HAV.
- HBV is found in blood and certain body fluids. It is spread when blood or body fluid from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not immune. HBV is spread through having unprotected sex with an infected person, sharing needles or "works" when "shooting" drugs, needlesticks or sharps exposures on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. Exposure to infected blood in ANY situation can be a risk for transmission.
- HCV is found in blood and certain body fluids. It is spread when blood or body fluid from an infected person enters another person's body. HCV is spread through sharing needles or "works" when "shooting" drugs, through needlesticks or sharps exposures on the job, or sometimes from an infected mother to her baby during birth. It is possible to transmit HCV during sex, but it is uncommon.

**Who is at risk?**

- **Household contacts of infected persons**
- **Sex partners of infected persons**
- **Children living in regions of the U.S. that had consistently elevated rates of hepatitis A during 1987–1997**
- **Persons traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common (everywhere except Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand)**
- **Men who have sex with men**
- **Injecting and non-injecting drug users**

Persons with chronic liver disease should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

- **Persons with more than one sex partner in a 6-month period**
- **Persons diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease**
- **Men who have sex with men**
- **Sex partners of infected persons**
- **Injecting drug users**
- **Household contacts of chronically infected persons**
- **Infants born to infected mothers**
- **Immigrants and children of immigrants from areas with elevated HBV rates, including Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Amazon Basin.**

**Healthcare and public safety workers who might be exposed to blood**

- **Chronic hemodialysis patients**

**Injection drug users**

- **Recipients of clotting factors made before 1987**
- **Hemodialysis patients**

**Recipients of blood or solid organ transplants before 1992**

- **Infants born to HCV-infected mothers**

**People with undiagnosed abnormal liver test results should be tested for HCV infection.**

**Incubation period:**

- **Hepatitis A:** 15 to 50 days, average 28 days
- **Hepatitis B:** 45 to 160 days, average 120 days
- **Hepatitis C:** 14 to 180 days, average 45 days

**What if you are infected?**

- **Hepatitis A:** There is no treatment for hepatitis A. Avoid alcohol. It can worsen liver disease.
- **Hepatitis B:** There is no treatment for hepatitis B. Avoid alcohol. It can worsen liver disease.
- **Hepatitis C:** There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C. HCV can be spread by sex, but this is rare. If you are not in a mutually monogamous relationship, use condoms correctly and every time to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. (The efficacy of latex condoms in preventing infection with HCV is unknown, but their proper use may reduce transmission.) You should also get vaccinated against hepatitis B.

**What treatment helps?**

- **Hepatitis A:** Hepatitis A vaccine is the best protection. It is recommended for all children at 1 year of age (i.e., 12–23 months) and individuals who are in risk groups for HAV infection or for severe outcomes from infection.
- **Hepatitis B:** Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection. Routine vaccination is recommended for all persons 0–18 years of age, and for persons of all ages who are in risk groups for HBV infection. All newborns should be given their first dose of hepatitis B vaccine before leaving the hospital.
- **Hepatitis C:** There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

More information to help you prevent hepatitis B and hepatitis C:

- Don't share personal care items that might have blood on them, such as razors, toothbrushes, and washcloths.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools or dye have someone else’s blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good sterilization practices.
- Healthcare or public safety workers should always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps. In addition, they should be vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- If you have or have had HBV or HCV infection, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.
- Don't shoot drugs. If you do, try to stop by getting into a treatment program. If you can’t stop, never share needles, syringes, water, or “works.” Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.

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*Disease rates are available from your state or local health department.*

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