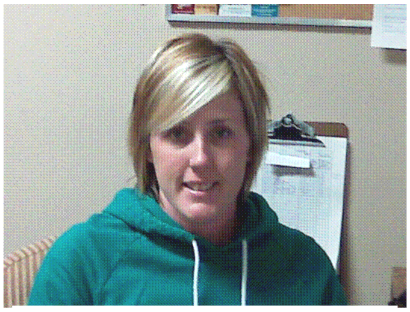
AIDS
Committee
Of
London

HEP C NEWS
Winter Edition 2010

HEP C NEWS



Sarah Wood
Harm Reduction/HCV Peer Support /Worker

Sheila Coad
Harm Reduction Services Manager/HCV Educator

We're ACOL's Hepatitis C workers. We provide education and support any chance we get. Bringing up the topic of a health issue, like Hep C, isn't always the easiest thing to do. By sharing what we know, we hope we can help make the topic a little easier to talk about.

Inside this issue:

Karen Burton
Needle Exchange Coordinator/HCV Support Worker

I think that most of you already know me! I'm Karen Burton the Needle Exchange Coordinator. I've recently taken on the role of Hep C Support Worker. Along with my work in the exchange, I'm available to help you through any Hep C concerns you may have, it can be from helping you to get tested, going to Doctors appointments with you, advocating on your behalf to helping you get housing.

So if you want to talk, just let me know!

Something you were looking for that you didn't see in here? Contact us and we will help you find it.

If you have any suggestions for the next newsletter let us know!

What is Hep C?

What is Hep C?

Hep C is a virus that's carried in blood. The virus infects the liver and causes inflammation and scarring. The body is tough and may be able to fight the infection, but most often Hep C is stronger and causes ongoing infection.

Transmission

Hep C is spread by blood-to-blood contact. You can get Hep C from sharing needles, pipes, straws, cookers, filters, ties or water for drug use with others, including your sex partner.

You can also get Hep C from piercing or tattooing equipment (including ink) already used on someone else. Sometimes you can get it from razors, nail clippers and toothbrushes, even if you can't see the blood. Having unprotected sex with someone who has Hep C also carries some risk for infection.

Prevention

Not just new needles when you use drugs – also use new cookers, filters, ties, acidifiers, swabs, water, pipes and straws every time.

-Use new needles when body piercing.
-Use new needles, ink, gloves, wipe cloths when tattooing.
-Have your own razors, toothbrushes, and manicure tools.
-Use a condom or dental dam for sex every time.

What are the Symptoms?

Many people don't have any symptoms when they first get Hep C. As the disease gets worse, some people start to feel tired all the time, have body aches, dry, itchy skin, "brain fog", or notice a yellowing of the skin.

Managing Common Symptoms

Chronic Hep C is often called a silent disease. This is largely because the liver is known as a "non-complaining" organ. Essentially, the liver can withstand a lot of damage and continue working. However, Hep C causes changes to a person's body and these changes can appear as signs and symptoms of the infection. The following identifies some of the most common Hep C symptoms, along with some tips for things you can do to start feeling better.

Aches and pains in muscles and joints are common in people living with Hep C.

Tips:

- Ask your healthcare provider about taking meds to help with the pain. Be sure to take them as directed because excessive use of some meds can cause lots of damage to your liver.
- Try mild exercise and stretching.

Fatigue and trouble sleeping may cause you to have a lack of energy and make you feel very tired.

Tips:

- Try to get regular sleep.
- Take short naps – no longer than 20 minutes.

Confusion ("brain fog") sometimes occurs in people living with Hep C.

Tips:

- Keep your mind and body active with light exercise or by doing other activities that stimulate your brain.
- Take time to rest and relax your mind.
- Keep track of when confusion sets in and use that time to rest. When the confusion is gone, spend time doing activities that need focus and attention.

Other tips:

- Keep in touch with your healthcare provider. He/she can help you manage your side effects.
- If you experience severe pain or discomfort, consider visiting Urgent Care.

Ways to Get Hep C That Don't Involve Injecting Drugs

By Nick Scrivo

IDU Outreach Worker

Counterpoint
Harm Reduction

Last issue I talked about how the equipment in Counterpoint Needle Exchange can help prevent you from getting Hepatitis C. There are other modes of Hepatitis C transmission and I'm going to talk about them below.

In the late 80s and early 90s it was possible to get Hepatitis C from blood transfusions or blood products because the blood supply wasn't screened for blood borne infections. This isn't an issue now because all donated blood is tested.

It continues to be possible to get Hepatitis C from sharing toothbrushes and shaving razors. Both people involved in sharing toothbrushes have to have bleeding gums or sores in their mouths for transmission to be possible. When it comes to sharing razors, both people have to cut themselves with the shaving razor to get Hepatitis C this way.

When it comes to using drugs, outside of the risks I talked about in the last issue about sharing injection equipment, you can also get Hepatitis C from smoking Crack or Meth from a shared pipe. Many people may already know that smoking Crack or Meth can give a person bad sores and chapped lips. For these reasons it's possible for blood to get on the pipe and into another person's bloodstream.

Hepatitis C is a resilient virus that can live outside of the body for a long period of time in blood that can't even be seen. Sharing pipes can expose people to Hepatitis C and there have been many studies that show that lots of people have been infected this way.

In London crack pipes or crack kits are available in very limited quantities from some outreach workers in the community. Unfortunately, at this point in time Counterpoint doesn't have the funding to consistently buy them so remember to try as hard as you can to have your own pipe and not use someone else's.

What even fewer people seem to know is that you can also get Hepatitis C from sharing snorting straws because there are mucus membranes in your nose that the virus can get into your blood stream through. So remember don't use someone else's straw when you're snorting drugs through your nose. Fortunately we have straws that you can keep on you here at Counterpoint so you can make sure you won't need someone else's.

FAQ's

Frequently Asked Questions About Hep C

What is the most common symptom of Hep C?

Fatigue

What does Hep C have to do with my liver?

The liver filters, cleanses, manufactures, and regulates almost everything that comes into contact with your body. The Hep C virus attacks liver cells and when your liver is damaged it can't do all of its jobs properly.

How can I live healthy with Hep C?

It's very possible to live healthy with Hep C. It's suggested that you eat a healthy diet, get as much daily physical activity as you can, decrease your alcohol and drug consumption as much as possible, and get yourself some supports.

If I have Hep C does that mean I'll get liver cancer?

No it doesn't. Out of every 100 individuals with Hep C, only 1-4 progress to the stage of liver cancer.

How long is treatment?

Treatment length depends on the type of Hep C you have. With genotypes 1, 4, 5, and 6, treatment length is 48 weeks (one year), and with genotypes 2 and 3 treatment length is 24 weeks (six months).

Common

MYTHS

About Hep C

I was tested for Hep C and it came back positive, so now I have Hep C.

Not necessarily. The first test you get done is called the antibody test. This test tells you if your body has ever been exposed to the Hep C virus. If this test comes back positive then you need to get a second test done, called the RNA test. The RNA test checks to see if the virus is still active in your body. 20-30% of people are able to fight the virus on their own and it doesn't progress to the chronic stage.

I can only get Hep C from sharing needles.

This isn't true. You can get Hep C from sharing any type of drug equipment (needles, cookers, crack pipes, etc). To practice safer drug use you should use everything new every time to prevent blood-to-blood contact.

My Hep C is the same as your Hep C.

This isn't true. Not everyone has the same type of Hep C, and you can get more than one type. There are 6 different types of Hep C, called genotypes, and they're labelled 1-6.

If I had Hep C I would experience symptoms.

This isn't always true. 70-80% of people don't have symptoms during the acute phase of Hep C (the first six months) and it can take 10-20 years before symptoms show up in the chronic phase of Hep C.

Jaundice (yellowing skin discoloration) is the first symptom of Hep C

Jaundice is often one sign of liver damage; however, this isn't always the case. Many people don't ever experience jaundice, and if they do it could be after having the virus for several years.

Testing

You may not know you have Hep C because often there are no symptoms, but by the time you feel sick, a lot of damage may already be done to your liver.

You should consider getting tested for Hep C if:

You think you've been exposed to the Hep C virus through contact with someone else's blood;
You've participated in a risk activity;
You experience symptoms consistent with liver disease;
You had a blood transfusion before 1992.

The important thing to remember is that testing is the only way to know for sure if you have Hep C. You may find out you don't have it and can take steps to make sure to protect yourself and others from possible Hep C infection. You might find out that you do have it and then you can make choices that will allow you to stay healthier before there's serious damage to your liver. Either way, it's better to know.

Getting tested in London is easy! Check out how.

Hepatitis C Testing at Middlesex London Health Unit

Hepatitis C bloodwork is regularly offered as part of screening for sexually transmitted infections at the Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Clinic at MLHU.
The STI Clinic operates on a drop-in basis at the 50 King Street location; **no appointment or health card is required**. Just bring yourself — and your partner, if you wish. The hours are:
Monday and Wednesday evenings from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Friday mornings from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

The expected return time for most results is one week after testing and we ask that you return to Clinic for these. If you are unable to return we can make other arrangements.

The Middlesex-London Health Unit holds 3 STI Clinics each week. The Clinics are first come first serve, each person takes a number and is called in order. Wait times vary. Each person is interviewed by a nurse and then sees the physician.

The nurse discusses your reasons for wanting testing, and reviews STI transmission, sexual partners and risk factors as part of the interview. The physician will then see each person, as required and perform any testing.

If you are concerned about Hepatitis C, we offer comprehensive explanations of potential risks, transmission and testing.

When results are reactive for the Hepatitis C screening test, supplementary testing to measure Hepatitis C RNA is required. Hep C RNA testing is a measure of active virus detected in the blood. Depending upon the result, this test may be repeated after 3 months.

When Hepatitis C RNA detected >15 IU/ml. a viral load test is included and we will then refer the client to a Hepatologist. We offer further counseling and information to clients regarding transmission risks for household contacts, sexual or IDU partners; contact notification; prevention; treatment and support services.

Please contact The Clinic, 50 King St. 519-663-5446 for more information.

ML
MIDDLESEX-LONDON
HEALTH
UNIT
www.healthunit.com

I Have Hep C, Now What?

Finding out that you have Hep C can come as a surprise and you can often be left feeling like you don't know what to do next. The following are some things you can think about to help start dealing with and living with your Hep C:

Testing:
If you've only had the first level of Hep C testing done (the antibody test) you should think about contacting a health care provider to get the next level of testing done (the RNA test). This test will let you know whether the Hep C virus is still active in your body or if you've cleared it on your own.

Living Healthy:
Take good care of yourself and protect your liver. Everything you eat drink, smoke, swallow, or rub on your skin goes through your liver. Since Hep C causes liver damage you'll want to think about what you put in your body so you can minimize the harm to your liver. Reduce your alcohol intake as much as you can because it's the most harmful thing for your liver. By eating a healthy, low-fat, low salt diet, drinking lots of water, and by getting enough rest and light exercise you'll help your liver do its job.

Inform Yourself:
Take the time to learn about your Hep C and make decisions about your health. Hep C is a slow moving disease so there's no need for you to make snap decisions. Do some research; take time to think.

Transmission:
Make sure you know how Hep C is spread so you can prevent transmitting it to others.
Hep C is only spread through blood-to- blood contact; knowing this will help you protect yourself and others.

Vaccines:
You may want to think about getting vaccinated against Hep A and Hep B to avoid getting more than one type of Hepatitis, which could be very hard on your liver. Talk to your healthcare provider about what type of Hep C you have (called your genotype) as well as how much Hep C you have in your blood (called viral load). All of this information will help you and your healthcare provider make the best treatment decision for you.

Treatment:
You may want to think about treatment. It isn't for everyone, and it works better for some than others. It's a very personal decision that should be based on what's right for you. Talk with a healthcare provider to find out more about treatment. You can live a healthy life with your Hep C.

Support:
Think about getting support. Many people find it helpful to join a support group or connect with other people through the internet who also have Hep C. Talk with people you care about and build a strong support system for yourself.

Dealing with Side Effects Of Treatment

Everyone experiences treatment differently. Some people have no side effects, while others have some or many. Most side effects can be helped with support from your healthcare provider, and some side effects can even be lessened by following the tips below.

Nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite
- Try to avoid spicy or greasy food.
- Eat small meals often.
- Ask your healthcare providers about anti-nausea meds.

Depression
- It's important to talk with a healthcare provider or social service worker if you feel depressed. Antidepressant drugs can help while being safe for your liver.

Fatigue
- Rest for long as you can, when you can.
- Schedule injections for days when you know you can rest.
- Try to get some light exercise to help you sleep.

Hair loss
- Avoid dyes, colours, blow dryers, and straighteners. Hair loss is often temporary.

Dry skin
- Drink lots of water and moisturize your skin.

Diarrhea
- Avoid diary and drink lots of water.

Muscle aches
- Ask your healthcare provider if pain relievers are okay to use.

Please report any other side effects to your healthcare provider.

Visiting Your Healthcare Provider

If you're thinking about seeing a healthcare provider about your Hep C, the following questions and tips may help you make the most out of your appointment. You may find it helpful to write some of these questions down before going to your appointment. Try to take a copy with you and jot notes during or after you see your healthcare provider. Hep C workers at the AIDS Committee of London are available and more than happy to go to your appointments with you, if you like.

Tips for your appointment:

Try to arrive on time or early to complete the check in process needed to be done before you can see your healthcare provider.

Be as patient as possible if your healthcare provider is running behind.

Ask questions when you don't understand and be actively involved in decisions about your health.

Thank the healthcare team if they do a good job. They may be able to help you set up appointments for times that work best for you.

Questions for your healthcare provider:

What kinds of symptoms can I expect now that I've been diagnosed with Hep C?

Do I need to be tested to see if I'm immune to Hepatitis A and/or B?

Should I be tested for HIV or other infections?

Should my partner(s) be tested?

What is my Hep C viral load?

What is my Hep C genotype?

What are the pros and cons of treatment?

What should I do if my health gets worse between now and the next time I see you?

When should I come for my next appointment?

If you've read something online or heard things from other people about Hep C, ask your healthcare provider about the info. It's important that you have the most safe and effective info out there.

What's Your Viral Load?

How much virus you have in your blood

If you don't have a healthcare provider or are having trouble finding one to help you with your Hep C, call or drop by the AIDS Committee of London. We can help!

Genotype: There are 6 major Hep C strains, numbered 1-6.

Did You Know???
People who have Hep C and are on methadone can still get Hep C treatment!

Herbs and Alternative Meds

Some people prefer to use herbs and alternative meds when dealing with an illness, and this is often true of people with chronic Hep C. This is in large part because of the sometimes difficult symptoms experienced during the chronic phase of Hep C or because of the side effects from treatment.

Herbs and other supplements may seem like the way to go; however, they aren't always the best idea. There are some herbs and vitamins that can be taken safely, but there are also some that should be used with caution or completely avoided. It's really important that you talk with a healthcare provider before trying any type of herbs or alternative meds.

There's some scientific evidence out there suggesting that herbs can help with different symptoms of Hep C, but the evidence isn't very consistent. Additionally, there hasn't been any research done to support the safety of herbs and supplements when taken at the same time as the Hep C treatment drugs. To mix these without first talking with a healthcare provider could be very dangerous.

Herbs and alternative meds can at times be helpful, but when dealing with Hep C the best method is to proceed with caution and to always consult a healthcare provider before going ahead with anything.

Here's a Healthy Recipe for You to Try!

Spaghetti Soup

Cooking time: 15 minutes
Preparation time: 10 minutes
Makes 4 servings

Ingredients

- 19 oz (540 mL) can tomatoes
- 2 cups (500 mL) chicken bouillon
- 2/3 cup (150 mL) uncooked spaghetti, broken into 1-inch (2.5-cm) pieces
- 1-1/2 cups (375 mL) frozen mixed vegetables
- 2 tsp (10 mL) dry Italian seasoning or 1 tsp (5 mL) each of basil and oregano
- 1/2 to 1 tsp (2 to 5 mL) sugar or honey
- sprinkling of freshly grated Parmesan cheese (optional)

In a large saucepan set over medium-high heat, bring tomatoes and bouillon to a boil, mashing tomatoes against side of pan with a wooden spoon. Then add spaghetti and cook, stirring often, for 5 minutes. Add frozen vegetables and seasoning. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, until spaghetti is soft, from 8 to 10 minutes. Stir sugar into soup, then ladle soup into bowls and sprinkle lightly with Parmesan, if using.

DISCLOSURE

Everyone with Hep C is faced with decisions when it comes to disclosing (telling others) about having the virus; who to tell, when to tell, and what details to tell are some things to think about.

The decision to share that you're living with Hep C is personal and it's important to remember that you don't have to tell anyone anything until you're ready. That being said, it's important that you talk to anyone who could come into contact with your blood, as soon as possible. You don't have to tell them that you have Hep C, but you'll want to give them enough information so that they can protect themselves against transmitting the virus.

When you tell people about your Hep C it's only natural that they'll be concerned and have questions, so it's important that you have accurate information about the virus before you disclose. This way you'll able to answer some of their questions.

Telling others that you're living with Hep C can be a difficult thing to do and it's very common to feel a range of emotions when dealing with it, such as anger and guilt. Finding a good support system can help you deal with these feelings and try to move forward. Whether it's a Hep C support group, family, or friends, these supports can help you get through this sometimes difficult period of disclosure.

3 Reasons to Disclose

1. To get support from others who know what it's like to be living with Hep C.
2. To get the best care and meds from your healthcare provider.
3. To protect others from becoming infected with Hep C.

For more information and support on disclosure contact us here at the AIDS Committee and we'll be happy to help you!

Stigma

We are among the most feared and demonized groups in society. Due to choices made concerning substances put in our bodies, governments and their associated programs deny human rights and dignity. The best way to positively confront and reduce stigma is through direct contact with a person who is a member of the identified group. Until society, law enforcement, healthcare providers and the service providers in our community can experience their own opinions and perceptions of drug users, we remain faceless and nameless. Breaking down barriers can be accomplished for the improvement of injection drug users and the government agencies that often oppose or at the very least misunderstand our actions, motives and behavior.

-Chris Bentley

Peer Social Support Group

There is a way to become meaningfully involved with a program that can bring past and present drug users and healthcare providers together. It can be a first step in helping yourself and also a step in becoming apart of reducing the stigma and associated prejudice that is directed towards us, simply by just being you.

Every third Wednesday of the month, the AIDS Committee of London meets with people from all walks of life who are seeking information about the prevention transmission, treatment and effective living with Hep C. If you are interested in honest answers, real life experiences and meeting others, who are living with, affected by or at risk of Hep C, we welcome you. The AIDS Committee hosts a monthly group where everyone can mutually support and learn from each other.

All services and supports are not exclusive to the Injection Drug user. If you want to inform and educate or learn and simply listen, everyone is welcome. If you are seeking support regarding all issues concerning people infected or affected by Hep C we need your contribution. If you are a member of the injection drug user community and wish to remain anonymous we will respect your confidentiality.

No matter who you are, remember we are here to support you. Why not join us and support yourself and others.

-Anonymous peer (who regularly attends the group)

Living with Hepatitis C Monthly Meeting with Sue Tobin

Held at Mission Services Safe Haven
3rd Thursday of every month from 1:30-3pm

“C” Life Peer Support Group

Held at the AIDS Committee of London
1st Tuesday of every month from 7-9pm

The John Gordon Home
A Home with Heart

The John Gordon Home is a nine bed residential health care facility. We provide support to people with HIV/AIDS and HCV (Hep C). Staff assists people who have immediate health care needs to realize positive health and wellness outcomes through the provision of transitional, respite, and end of life care.

Residents are admitted through a planned referral and assessment for up to nine months with a maximum of twelve months stay. Eight of our units are fully furnished one bedroom apartments and one unit is a respite bed sitting room. The monthly occupancy charge includes heat/air conditioning, telephone, TV cable, internet, security, controlled entry, laundry facilities, and meals.

Onsite front line staff is available 24 hours per day including Registered Nursing staff and personal support workers. The food services coordinator plans and prepares nutritious meals, individualized to accommodate special diet requirements. Our office manager assists residents with money/budget/financial matters as required. Volunteers are available to support residents on an individual basis.

Our services also include individualized care plans that are prepared from personal identified goals, medication administration, community coordination, and assistance with laundry and housekeeping as required.

For further information visit the website at www.johngordonhome.ca or telephone 519-433-3591.

Yvonne Rimbault RPN
Resident Care Coordinator

The Canadian Liver Foundation

The Canadian Liver Foundation was the first organization in the world devoted to providing support for research and education into the causes, diagnoses, prevention and treatment of all liver disease. The Foundation actively supports approximately one third of the leading liver researchers across the country through our research granting program. The London Chapter of the Canadian Liver Foundation has a variety of resources on hepatitis that is available free of charge to the public. You can access these resources by contacting the London CLF chapter by phone at 519-659-0951, by email cmckinlay@liver.ca or online at www.liver.ca

For more details on any of these events or to be a volunteer with the London Chapter of the Canadian Liver Foundation please contact 519-659-0951.

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The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.