



## HEPATITIS C

Information, advice, testing,  
support & training service

### **Hepatitis C can be transmitted through sex**

It is complicated but the general information about sexual transmission is broken down by type of sexual activity, how long you have been with a certain sexual partner and whether people have sexually transmitted diseases. For straight people who are in a stable long-term monogamous relationship the chances of giving or getting hepatitis C are very low.

### **The definition of “straight people in a long-term monogamous relationship”**

The information available on heterosexual long-term monogamous partners is that it is uncommon to pass it sexually. That is usually defined as a straight person in a relationship for 5-10 (or more) years and who doesn't have sex with anyone else outside of the relationship. In this group the chances are very low – in fact it is not recommended that these people change their current sexual practices.

### **Level of risk**

There is a lot of confusion as to how hepatitis C is transmitted sexually. First of all, it can be transmitted sexually but the information we have now tells us that it doesn't happen very often, especially in long-term monogamous straight relationships, where, if anything, it is considered rare. The important thing to remember is that hepatitis C is only spread by direct blood-to-blood contact.

In order to transmit or become infected with hepatitis C, HCV infected blood must get into one bloodstream from another. The most common ways you can get hepatitis C are from sharing needles and the stuff you use to inject drugs (needles, cookers, cotton, ties, water, etc). The other common ways you can get hepatitis C are from a blood product and/or a blood transfusion you received before 1992. People who receive haemodialysis treatments are also at risk.

Less common ways that HCV is transmitted are from an HCV positive mother who can pass it on to her baby, but this doesn't happen very often. The ways that hepatitis C can be transmitted that don't happen very often include sexual transmission, tattoos, piercing, straws to snort drugs and sharing hygiene items such as toothbrushes and razor blades.

There is still the chance of passing it on to your sexual partner. Both people in the relationship need to discuss the risk and (even though low) there is a slight possibility that someone could give or get hepatitis C even in this group.

### **Not in a stable monogamous straight relationship**

That's where it gets a little more complicated. We believe that people who have a lot of sexual partners, have other sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes, HIV or hepatitis B or any sex that involves blood, are at a higher risk for transmitting or getting hepatitis C through sex. The chances for having blood exposure through anal sex, rough sex, and dry sex are also higher. Sex toys that are shared between partners could also have blood on them. In these cases it is always best to practice safer sex (using condoms, etc) to prevent giving or getting hepatitis C and other diseases.

### **Sex and menstruation**

Since there is blood present it is recommended that barrier methods be used during sex if the woman is HCV positive.

### **Other advice**

There are practical tips for preventing transmission in general. Remember that blood is the issue so any open cuts or wounds should be covered and it's probably always best to err on the side of caution just to be safe.

It's always a good idea to ask questions – talk to your medical provider or a counsellor about ways to stay safe. If at all in doubt it is always better to be safe until you learn all the facts about sexual transmission of hepatitis C.