Hepatitis C is a disease resulting from infection with the hepatitis C virus.

**Acute hepatitis C** occurs in the first 6 months after a person is infected with the hepatitis C virus. Most people never experience any symptoms or very only very mild flu-like symptoms. 15% of people who are infected with the hepatitis C virus will spontaneously clear the infection.

**Chronic hepatitis C** occurs when the hepatitis C virus remains in the body. Over time, it can lead to serious liver damage; cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer.

**How common is hepatitis C?**

Worldwide, 200 million people are infected with the hepatitis C virus – approximately 3% of the world’s population.

An estimated 45-50,000 New Zealanders have the hepatitis C virus but only 25% of those have been diagnosed.

Hepatitis C is twenty times more common than HIV.

**How do I get hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is spread when blood from a person infected with hepatitis C enters the body of someone who is not infected.

**Can hepatitis C be cured?**

The treatment for hepatitis C will cure about 65% of people overall.

New treatments currently being developed and trialled may increase this cure rate even further.

Only 25% of New Zealanders with hepatitis C have been diagnosed.
Who is at risk of having hepatitis C?

- People who share needles or other equipment to inject drugs
- People who received a blood transfusion before 1992
- People who have lived in, or received health care in South East Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, or Eastern Europe
- People who have been in prison and used unsterile needles or been involved in unsafe tattooing practices
- Anyone with abnormal, unexplained liver function.

How do I know if I have hepatitis C?

Most people who have hepatitis C have no signs or symptoms for many years. The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to have a blood test.

If you think you may have been exposed to the virus, speak to your GP about being tested.

How can I avoid getting hepatitis C?

Although there is currently no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C, you can take reasonable precautions to avoid becoming infected with the hepatitis C virus.

- Do not share needles or other equipment to inject drugs or any other substances
- Do not use personal items that may have come in contact with an infected person’s blood such as shavers or toothbrushes
- Avoid touching blood or open wounds
- Avoid sexual practices that might risk blood contact including trauma, during menstruation, or in presence of genital ulcers.

If you think you have been exposed to the virus, speak to your GP about being tested.