

Section 10: Infectious Disease Diagnosis & Treatment

Hepatitis C Diagnosis and Treatment

Key points

- All patients with opioid use disorders, history of injection drug use or inhalation (“snorting”), or non-professional tattoos or piercings should be screened for the hepatitis C virus (HCV). People who are HCV antibody positive should have follow-up viral load testing to determine whether chronic active disease is present. Testing for HCV *genotype* is optional during pregnancy, as it will not change perinatal management, but is useful to guide treatment after delivery
- Patients who are viral load positive should receive the following information:
 - Hepatitis C is a chronic disease of the liver which should be treated to avoid liver damage. New medications for HCV are highly effective and have minimal side effects. They are not currently recommended for use during pregnancy or lactation
 - A positive viral load indicates that Hepatitis C is contagious and precautions are necessary to prevent transmission to partners and household members
 - The rate of sexual transmission of HCV is estimated to be about 15% (CDC, 2016). Condom use is recommended unless a partner is already infected with the same HCV genotype
 - Avoid contact with the blood of an infected person, including sharing razors, toothbrushes, etc.
- The rate of vertical transmission from mother to fetus is around 6% (CDC, 2016), higher if the mother is also HIV positive. This rate is similar for vaginal and cesarean birth
- There is no known case of transmission through breastmilk (CDC, 2016). However, breastfeeding is not recommended if nipples are cracked or bleeding, or open lesions are present on the breast. CDC guidance is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/disease/hepatitis.htm>
- Infants exposed to Hepatitis C prenatally should have follow up testing by their pediatric provider at 18 months of age (CDC, 2016)

- People who have active Hepatitis C should be referred to a specialist or primary care provider with experience in hepatitis management

Resources for providers

- From the Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/hcvfaq.htm#g1>
- Interpretation of HCV test results: https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/pdfs/hcv_graph.pdf

Resources for patients

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
<http://www.acog.org/~media/For%20Patients/faq093.pdf>
- American College of Nurse Midwives:
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1016/j.jmwh.2005.03.020/pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/cfaq.htm>
- *Link to video: "Hepatitis C in Pregnancy:"* A conversation with Dr. Tim Lahey, Infectious Disease.
<https://dhmc.wistia.com/medias/dhsjkydhv1>