



You may need to get tested for hepatitis C

An estimated 3.2 million Americans are infected with chronic hepatitis C, a viral infection of the liver. Among those are larger numbers of Veterans and baby boomers.

The CDC recently recommended that all baby boomers in the U.S. (those born between 1945 and 1965) get a simple one-time blood test for hepatitis C. They estimate that this testing could identify more than 800,000 additional people with the disease.

HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW:

- Chronic hepatitis C won't go away on its own.
- Many people living with hepatitis C are not aware they have the condition and may go years without showing symptoms. Hepatitis C is treated with a combination of medications.
- The rate of hepatitis C among people born in 1945 through 1965 is about 4%, compared to about 1% among other Americans. That difference is likely due to risky behaviors among this group.
- You can get hepatitis C from infected blood or body fluids. Today, the most common way people get infected is by needle-sharing during intravenous drug use. Most new infections occur among drug users. In addition, an infected pregnant woman can infect her unborn baby.
- Since 1992, when reliable blood screening procedures became available, the risk of transmission of hepatitis C by blood transfusion has fallen to less than one per million units of transfused blood, according to the CDC. Rarely, the virus can be transmitted through sexual intercourse.
- Hepatitis C is not transmitted through shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, breastfeeding, or sharing cups and utensils.
- Hepatitis C can cause serious liver problems.