

## Hepatitis A, B and C

### What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver and can be caused by numerous viruses. The most common are the hepatitis B virus and the hepatitis C virus. Some, but not all, of those who become infected with these viruses will develop symptoms such as jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin), tiredness, nausea or stomach pains. Both viruses can cause chronic infection, which can lead to serious liver damage after many years. Others will fight off the virus without the disease developing. It's not possible to tell from the symptoms which virus you have been infected with, or whether you have shaken off the virus or are a chronic carrier. Only a blood test can show this.

### How is hepatitis B transmitted?

In countries where hepatitis B is common, the virus is usually transmitted at birth or through contact with infected family members during the first years of life. The disease can also be transmitted via unprotected sex and via blood, for example by sharing needles. People with chronic hepatitis B can infect others even if they do not have any symptoms themselves.

### How is hepatitis C transmitted?

Hepatitis C is usually transmitted via blood or via medical equipment at hospitals. The most common route of infection in Norway and many other parts of the world is sharing needles. Transmission from mother to child and through unprotected sex is possible but rare.

### Why is it important to be tested for hepatitis B and C?

It's important to be tested for hepatitis B and C so that you can be offered treatment to stop the disease from developing. It's also important to know if you're infected so that you can take precautions to avoid infecting others.

### How can I avoid infection with hepatitis B and C?

Using a condom prevents the transmission of both hepatitis B and C through sexual intercourse. If you inject drugs, using clean needles and equipment protects against both hepatitis B and C.

A vaccine is available for hepatitis B, and those who are at high risk of infection can get it for free. The vaccine can be given to sexual partners and others who have close contact with chronic carriers of hepatitis B. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

The risk of the hepatitis B virus passing from an infected mother to her child during pregnancy can be reduced if the child is given the vaccine and immunoglobulin as soon as possible after birth.

Chronic hepatitis B carriers must use a condom if they have sex with someone who is not vaccinated.

**What can be done if I'm infected with hepatitis B or C?**

It's important for chronic carriers of the virus to be monitored by their doctor through regular blood tests to decide whether and when treatment should be given. All those diagnosed with chronic hepatitis C infection should therefore be assessed for treatment by a specialist. Successful treatment can get rid of the virus, but you will not be protected against re-infection if you continue to take risks. Chronic hepatitis B can also be treated with special medicines to slow the development of serious liver disease, but the treatment rarely gets rid of the virus for good.

**Hepatitis A** is another virus that can cause inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis A passes on its own without treatment and never becomes chronic. Once you've had hepatitis A, you have immunity for the rest of your life. Hepatitis A is transmitted through contaminated food and water and via blood, for example by sharing needles.