

Hepatitis C

AN INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR DRUG USERS

WHAT IS HEP C?

Hepatitis is caused by a virus which attacks your Liver. You are more likely to catch Hep C if you do not use a condom during sex or if you are involved in 'risky' drug use (sharing of works, poor hygiene). But drug users are not the only people that can catch Hep C.

HOW DO YOU CATCH IT?

Hep C is easier to catch than HIV, especially if you share works. Hep C is normally passed through sharing injecting works or by having sex without using a condom. Also, babies of mothers who are carrying the virus may also become infected during pregnancy or at birth.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I HAVE IT?

You can be infected by Hep C without having any symptoms, although in some rare cases you could have an acute attack. With an acute attack, you would feel generally ill and tired and lose your appetite. Sometimes your skin and eyes might have a yellow colour (jaundice) - this means your Liver isn't working properly. These symptoms can last for 2-12 weeks and can, in extreme cases lead to death.

The easiest way to find out if you have Hep C is to ask your GP or drug centre to arrange a test. This test will show if you have been infected in the past— another test will then tell if you are at risk of infecting others.

WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE IT?

You must have regular Health checks. If you are found to have acute Hep C your GP will do liver function tests. You should use a condom each time you have sex and stop sharing drug works. If possible you should only use clean/new works (your drug worker can show you how).

It is important to take extra care of yourself. Try and eat 5 servings of fruit and vegetables each day. Drinking lemon juice each morning and evening will help cleanse your liver. Uncooked shellfish can be very dangerous if you have acute liver damage.

WHAT TREATMENT IS THERE?

Only 1 in 10 people who test positive for Hep C need immediate treatment. The rest will be monitored regularly by their GP.

The treatment for acute Hep C is normally called Interferon Alfa, but this is not yet available everywhere. Half of those treated with Interferon get better.

WHICH DRUGS CAUSE THE MOST HARM?

Most Harmful:

Alcohol

Even if you have a healthy Liver regular consumption can cause problems. If you have liver damage you are at real risk of getting acute Hep C.

Medium Harm:

Speed

The drug itself can cause liver damage but how you act while 'speeding' causes more damage– staying up 3 nights straight, not eating, not drinking enough water etc.

Ecstasy:

Same as for speed. Although if enough water is not consumed this drug could cause more damage to your Liver.

Benzos:

These drugs stay in the body longer than other drugs so can cause liver damage with excessive use.

Some Harm:

Heroin

There is a very slight risk of liver damage with regular use.

SAFER INJECTING ADVICE

IT IS NOT SAFE TO SHARE WORKS

Safer Injecting Practice

Always Use new/clean (sterilised) single Needles and Barrels for each Injection.

OR

IF YOU SHARE WORKS THERE IS A HUGE RISK, BUT..

For more advice on safer injecting, ask your drug worker, or pick up our safer injecting leaflet.

If there are no Clean, Unused Needles available, follow advice given on How to Clean Used works in the Safer Injecting leaflet.

All contact with us is dealt with on Strictly Confidential Terms

Phone Port Talbot
(01639) 890863

Or

Neath
(01639) 620222

Phone Us, Call In, or Write.

You will be made Welcome

Needle Exchange is also available on this premises