

Immunisation

Your child should receive all the recommended childhood immunisations. It is important for children with hepatitis C to be immunised against hepatitis B (part of the usual childhood vaccination schedule) and hepatitis A. This is to prevent them getting another type of hepatitis virus which will further affect their liver and may cause liver disease to develop more quickly.

Who do you tell?

By law, you don't need to tell anyone that your child has hepatitis C.

Everyone should be practising standard precautions. Therefore it is up to you if you want to tell the school, friends or family members.

It is a good idea to tell your family doctor and dentist so that they can provide you and your child with any extra medical support.

When do I tell my child?

Children understand information at different times. Generally children from about eight years of age will have a basic ability to understand that they have hepatitis C. Some children will be ready earlier than others to be told. It is important that you tell them the truth and tell them as early as you can.

It is important to educate children with hepatitis C from a young age so you can teach them to look after themselves and maintain good health as they grow.

The doctors, nurses and support staff can help you during this time.

Treatment options available

Children with hepatitis C may be just monitored, or may receive treatment, depending on how their liver is functioning, blood results, liver biopsy and ultrasound results.

The doctor will discuss the possibility of treatment with you, as this is dependent on a range of factors.

Support Teams

The NSW Children Hospitals have a wide range of resources to assist your child and your family, including social workers, nurses, psychologists, speech therapists and dieticians.

Referral

If your child has hepatitis C, your local doctor can refer your child to the paediatric viral hepatitis nurse. The nurse will refer your child to the nearest children's hospital listed below. The letter can be faxed through to contacts below.

Contact:

The Paediatric Viral Hepatitis Nurse
The Children's Hospital at Westmead
Phone: (02) 9845 3989
Fax: (02) 98453970
Email: kidshepbinfo@chw.edu.au

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

Phone: (02) 98450000
www.chw.edu.au



Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick

Phone: (02) 9382 1688
www.sch.edu.au



Kaleidoscope, Hunter Children's Health Network

Tel: (02) 4921 3670
www.kaleidoscope.org.au



Additional resources:

Hepatitis NSW www.hep.org.au

Hepatitis Australia www.hepatitisaustralia.com

Live wire an Australian website developed by the Starlight Foundation for children and adolescents aged 10 – 18 with chronic illness: www.livewire.org.au

www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au

www.childliverdisease.org

Hepatitis C

information for parents and families



What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is a slow-acting virus that causes liver inflammation and disease. Hepatitis C is spread through blood to blood contact with someone who is already infected. There are six main types of hepatitis C that have been identified - these are known as genotypes numbered 1 to 6. Genotype 1 and 3 are the most common types found in Australia

How is HCV transmitted in children?

Of 100 babies born to mothers who have hepatitis C, around 5 to 7 of those babies will acquire the virus. This is known as "vertical transmission", often called mother-to-baby transmission.

There are other ways that the virus is spread, such as sharing intravenous needles, using unsterile contaminated tattooing/ piercing equipment or medical equipment, through blood transfusions in countries with high rates of hepatitis C, or exposure to blood in the home. These methods of spread are known as "horizontal transmission".

Hepatitis C in children

Children with hepatitis C develop and grow and require the same care as other children. All children, whether they have hepatitis C or not, require a healthy balanced diet, adequate exercise and sleep. As with all children, forming friendships and participating in their community plays an important role in a child's social development.

The effects of hepatitis C in children are not well known. Most children with hepatitis C will grow and develop normally without significant liver disease in childhood, however in a small number of cases significant liver disease can occur, including chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer. It is not known to which children with hepatitis C that this will happen.

Regular checks by a liver specialist can help detect any problems of this kind at the earliest opportunity.

Some young children infected with hepatitis C will clear the virus themselves; this usually happens up to the age of six.

Breastfeeding

Like other women, mothers with hepatitis C are encouraged to breast feed. However mothers with hepatitis C who have cracked and bleeding nipples should express and discard the milk from that side until the nipple has healed. This is due to an increased risk of transmission of HCV as there is blood present. During this time you may need to supplement your baby's milk with an infant formula.

How do you know if your child has hepatitis C?

The only way to find out if your child has the hepatitis C virus is by a blood test.

They may not have any obvious symptoms, even though liver damage may be happening.

Testing

It is important that all babies born to mothers who are HCV RNA (PCR) positive are tested. A baby born to a mother with hepatitis C will have their mother's antibodies in their system until they are around 18 months of age.

There are two types of blood test that can be done to see if your child has hepatitis C.

The HCV RNA (PCR) test can be done from two months of age. This detects the presence of the hepatitis C virus in the blood. It can also measure the amount of virus (viral load) in the blood.

A hepatitis C antibody test is best done at 18 months of age. This shows exposure to the virus but it does not measure the amount of the virus. If this is positive, your child will need further testing.

If your child has hepatitis C, why do they need to be monitored?

Early diagnosis and regular check-ups are important for a child with any chronic disease.

Most children show no signs or symptoms that they have hepatitis C and can appear healthy even though liver damage may be happening.

Regular visits to the liver specialist will allow you to discuss any concerns you may have about your child's health, treatment and care options.

The liver specialist will see your child every six months, although this may change over time.

The two main things that will happen during these visits will be:

1. A blood test to measure your child's liver function and to check if the hepatitis C virus is still present in their system.
2. Your child may need an ultrasound to check their liver. An ultrasound is a simple procedure that will take about 20 minutes.

Liver biopsy

The doctor will discuss with you the need for a liver biopsy, its risks and benefits after seeing your child's results.

Children always have sedation or anaesthetic for this procedure. A very fine needle is inserted through the skin and into the liver and a tiny piece of liver is taken and sent to the laboratory for testing.

Looking after you and your family

Standard precautions should always be taken – which means avoiding contact with another person's blood, urine and other bodily fluids.

Do not share razor blades, toothbrushes or nail clippers. Blood spills need to be cleaned up and cuts covered with a waterproof bandaid.