

Hep C factsheet

Test counselling



Introduction

Pre-test discussion

Information that should be discussed in pre-test discussion

Post-test discussion (giving test results)

Information that should be discussed in post-test discussion

Also see

- Your need for confidentiality and privacy.
- Information about the testing process (including the window period), how results are provided and the government notification process.
- What a negative or positive result might mean for you.
- Whether you are ready for a test OR whether you understand all the necessary information about what a test means.
- Whether you have support and can cope while waiting for the test results.
- Whether you give informed consent for the test to be done.

Introduction

When requesting an HCV test or receiving the results of one, your GP should brief you on hepatitis C (also called hep C) and explain how the test works. Your GP should also explore how you'd respond to the result, whether it comes back positive or negative.

Delivering possible bad news can be a delicate situation. Pre- and post-test discussion makes really good sense, and should always be carried out.

Pre-test discussion

Pre-test discussion aims to assess whether you are, or was ever at risk of contracting HCV. It should be tailored to you and must be conducted in private, in an understandable level of language.

Pre-test discussion should not be rushed and should include the following points:

- Your level of risk (of having caught hep C).
- How to reduce future risk of catching hep C.
- Whether tests for other blood borne viruses (e.g. hep B or HIV) should be done.

Information that should be discussed in pre-test discussion

- Having a PCR test to confirm whether you cleared your hep C within your initial 12 month acute infection stage.
- Your immediate needs and support (including written information resources).
- Information about safer behaviours to help you avoid passing on your hep C to others.
- The limited legal requirement to tell others about your hep C.
- How to manage the possible emotional reaction to such news.
- Your options for drug treatment and medical management.
- Your options for ongoing counselling and treatment (if required).
- Complementary therapies to help manage your hep C.
- Advice on an ongoing management plan to monitor your hep C.

Basic hep C brochures or booklets should be provided, preferably in your main language, and arrangement for a post-test appointment should be made during pre-test counselling.

Post-test discussion (giving test results)

The result of an HCV test should always be given to you in person no matter what the reason for the test or whether the result is negative or positive.

Post-test discussion enables GPs to follow up and ensure that you understood your pre-test counselling.

If the test comes back negative, your GP should provide counselling and information that helps enable you to remain HCV negative.

The antibody test window period should also be discussed in regard to possible false test results - ie. if you were exposed to transmission risk within the previous six months your test result might say negative when in fact you may have an HCV infection (see Antibodies and antibody testing).

If your test comes back positive, the GP should revisit pre-test counselling points and further explain any areas as requested by you.

In some cases, the test results are neither 'positive' or 'negative'. These are called 'indeterminate' results and in these cases, further tests using different technologies are used (see PCR and HCV transmission).

Explanation of treatment with interferon, including access through Section 100 PBS (also see Combination drug therapy factsheet) should be given - as should explanation of other treatment options and trials, including Chinese herbal preparations

Your GP should be able to provide or arrange for immediate discussion and support, if required. Sufficient time in the consultation should be allowed for this process.

Information that should be discussed in post-test discussion

- Having a PCR test to confirm whether you cleared your hep C within your initial 12 month acute infection stage.
- Your immediate needs and support (including written information resources).
- Information about safer behaviours to help you avoid passing on your hep C to others.
- The limited legal requirement to tell others about your hep C.
- How to manage the possible emotional reaction to such news.
- Your options for drug treatment and medical management.
- Your options for ongoing counselling and treatment (if required).
- Complementary therapies to help manage your hep C.
- Advice on an ongoing management plan to monitor your hep C.

Also see:

Antibody testing

PCR & HCV transmission

PCR availability

Pegylated combo therapy

- This factsheet is abridged from *A Strategy for the detection and management of hepatitis C in Australia*, NHMRC 1997, and *National Hepatitis C Testing Policy*, Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing 2007.