Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a type of hepatitis that can cause inflammation and damage to the liver. It is transmitted through blood-to-blood contact, primarily through injection drug use, needle stick injury, blood transfusion, unsanitary tattooing or piercing, or high-risk sexual contacts. HCV is estimated to infect more than 80 to 125 million people worldwide, of whom 3 to 4 million become newly infected each year.

Symptoms of acute hepatitis C may include:
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Joint pain
- Jaundice

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Diagnosis

Blood is tested for HCV antibodies to confirm a current infection. If the test is positive, HCV RNA is tested to confirm the presence of the virus. The HCV genotype is determined through a blood test. There are 6 main HCV genotypes which influence treatment options.

Treatment

The goal of treatment is to eradicate the virus from the body. Antiviral medications are prescribed to inhibit the virus's replication. If the virus is not eradicated, the liver can continue to be damaged.

Monitoring and treatment

Antibodies to HCV are present in the blood, allowing blood tests to detect if the virus is present. Antibodies can be present in the blood for years after the virus has cleared, so they are not used to diagnose current infection.

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