



## GROUP HEALTH CENTRE

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# Ontario Hepatitis Nursing Program What Are the Tests for Hep C?

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There are tests to find out:

- ~ If you have the Hep C virus.
- ~ The type of Hep C virus you have.
- ~ How much of the virus is present in your blood.
- ~ If the virus is damaging your liver.

**NO ONE TEST GIVES A COMPLETE PICTURE.** A doctor looks at: blood tests, a liver biopsy, and also considers how you feel before she/he can know how much your liver has been damaged.

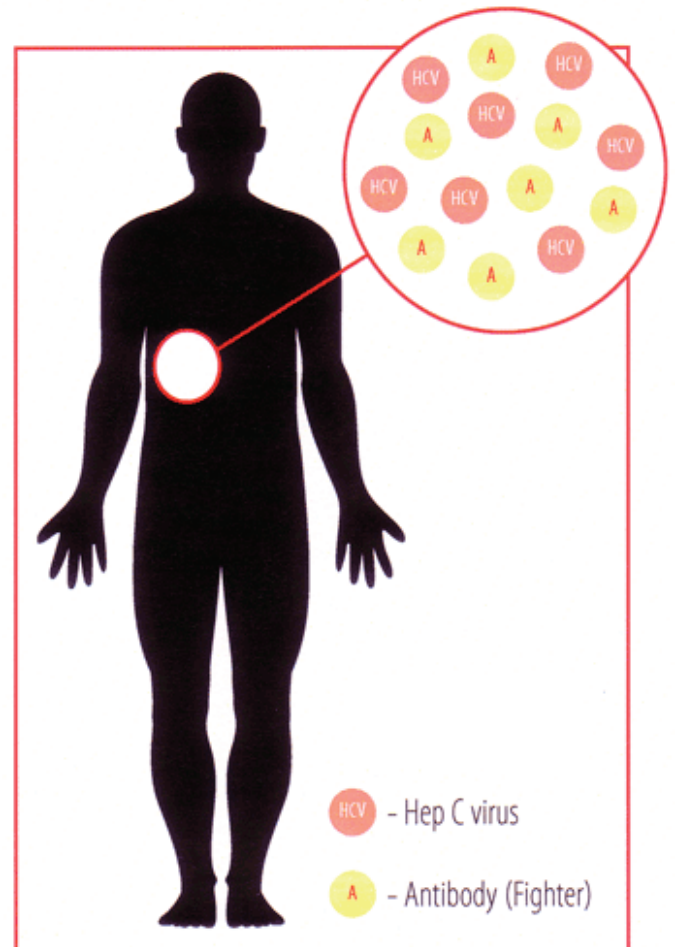
First you must know that:

- ~ If the Hep C virus gets into your body, your body produces fighters that specifically target the Hep C virus.
- ~ These fighters are called Hep C antibodies.
- ~ It can take 3 or more months for your body to produce the fighters (*antibodies*) after the Hep C virus gets into your body.
- ~ Sometimes, with the help of the fighters (*antibodies*), your body can get rid of the Hep C virus without drug treatment (*about 15 in a 100 people*).

### The first Hep C test:

- ~ The first blood test does not look for the Hep C virus.
- ~ The first test looks for the Hep C fighters (*antibodies*).
- ~ Remember that it can take up to three or more months to make the fighters (*antibodies*).

~ If the first test comes back positive for the fighters (*antibodies*), then there is an 85% chance that you have the Hep C virus.



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### The second test (HCV RNA):

~ The second blood test checks for the presence of the Hep C virus.

~ If it is positive, you have the Hep C virus (*as well as the fighters*).

~ If it is negative, this means you don't have the Hep C virus but you still have the fighters (*antibodies*).

~ Once you have the fighters, you will always have them.

~ The fighters can't hurt you, but you can still catch the virus again (*having the antibodies does not mean that you are immune to getting the Hep C virus again*).

### Viral load:

~ This blood test checks how much of the virus is in your blood.

### Genotype:

~ There are different types of Hep C virus - each is called a genotype.

~ They are like the different members of the same family - related but not all are exactly alike.

~ Genotype testing is done to figure out the length of time someone receives drug treatment.

Once a doctor knows that you have the Hep C virus, more tests are done to see if the Hep C virus is damaging your liver.

~ When your liver is infected with Hep C, substances (*enzymes*) that are normally made

by your liver can leak out of the liver into the bloodstream.

~ A blood test can tell if you have higher than normal levels of these enzymes leaking into your blood.

~ Drinking large amounts of alcohol can increase these enzymes in your blood.

~ Two common tests are AST and ALT.

See [www.labtestonline.org/index.html](http://www.labtestonline.org/index.html) for more information about other lab tests.

### A liver biopsy is:

~ A special procedure to remove a tiny piece of your liver, which is then examined under a microscope.

~ The most common way to tell how much liver damage, if any, is present.

~ Also done to be sure that liver disease is the cause of your symptoms.

### How is a biopsy done?

~ A specialized doctor does the liver biopsy.

~ The skin above the area of your liver is frozen; a needle is put through your skin into the liver; a tiny piece is sucked through the needle into the syringe.

~ Sometimes an ultrasound is done first to locate the exact position of your liver.

~ You are awake for the whole procedure.

~ If you are stressed out before the test, the doctor may give you a medication to calm you down.

**“ Find out what your disease stage is. You are probably not as sick as you think you are. ”** Mary Frances (living with Hep C)

