

Hepatitis C Screen

Hepatitis C tests are used to screen for and diagnose a hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. The HCV RNA test, Quantitative (HCV viral load) detects and measures the number of viral RNA particles in the blood. This test may be used to confirm the presence of the virus and diagnose an active infection. Viral load tests are also used before and during treatment to help determine response to therapy by comparing the amount of virus before and during treatment.

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis C virus. HCV is the leading cause of liver cancer and liver transplants. Most people with HCV don't have symptoms for many years. During this time, HCV may be slowly attacking the liver. By the time symptoms finally do appear, the liver is often already harmed.

Who should be tested for HCV?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends testing for HCV for people in the following categories:

- Have ever injected illegal drugs
- Received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992
- Have received clotting factor concentrates produced before 1987
- Were ever on long-term dialysis
- Are children born to HCV-positive women
- Have been exposed to the blood of someone with hepatitis C
- Are healthcare, emergency medicine, or public safety workers who had needlesticks, sharps, or mucosal exposure to HCV-positive blood
- Have evidence of chronic liver disease
- Have HIV
- Were born between 1945 and 1965, regardless of other risk factors for HCV as 75% of adults infected with HCV are baby boomers

What are the symptoms of HCV?

Because people can be infected for years or even decades before symptoms show up, serious liver damage could already have occurred. When symptoms do appear, they can include:

- Fever
- Dark urine
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)
- Loss of appetite
- Stomach pain
- Tiredness
- Nausea and vomiting

Is HCV curable?

If you are infected, treatments are available that may be able to slow or stop the damage to your liver. If caught in time, many people can even be cured.

What type of HCV test is being performed?

The blood test being performed is a Hepatitis C Antibody with Reflex to Hepatitis C Virus RNA, Quantitative, Real-Time PCR. This is the test recommended by the CDC for confirmation of an HCV infection. The initial antibody test is used to screen for past exposure and current infection. It detects the presence of antibodies to the virus, indicating an exposure to HCV. If the HCV antibody test reports as "positive", a second test, or reflex, will be done to detect and measure the number of viral RNA particles in the blood. This test may be used to confirm the presence of the virus and diagnose an active infection. Viral load tests are also used before and during treatment to help determine response to therapy by comparing the amount of virus before and during treatment.

See other side for more information on the Hepatitis C screening test.

What should I do if my results are positive or negative?

It is always recommended you meet with a healthcare provider to determine what your laboratory test results mean to you. Your healthcare provider will review all of your test results and, combined with your health history, will be able to provide an accurate picture of your health status.

If your results were positive: Since the HCV test requires a reflex test for confirmation, a person with a positive result is considered to be infected with HCV.

If your results were negative: A negative test for HCV means there is either no infection or it is too early after exposure for the test to be accurate. If you have concerns that you might be positive for HCV, retesting at a later time may be required.

What other resources are available to learn more about my health and laboratory tests?

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov
- Lab Tests Online: labtestsonline.org
- Quest Diagnostics: questdiagnostics.com

DLO Direct offers direct access to laboratory testing for informational purposes. A DLO Direct lab test result is not a medical diagnosis and is not intended as medical advice. Only a healthcare provider can interpret lab results and diagnose a medical condition or disease.

Because tests have not been ordered by a healthcare provider, third party entities, including Medicare and Medicaid, will not reimburse for these tests.



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