

Hepatitis G

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Hepatitis G virus (HGV) also known as GB virus-C (GBV-C) is often found in co-infections with other viruses, such as:

- hepatitis C virus,
- hepatitis B virus, and
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

The significance of hepatitis G infection in the presence of other viral causes of acute or chronic hepatitis is not well understood.

However evidence suggests that HGV/GBV-C viruses do not cause hepatitis in humans. It is possible that it may not be a true 'hepatitis' virus. HGV and GB virus-C were both discovered in 1995/6, and are thought to be different strains of the same virus.

What are the symptoms?

Almost no cases have symptoms like the other hepatitis viruses (A, B, C and E).

Hepatitis G virus has a carrier rate of between 2 and 5 percent in the general population. It causes persistent infection for up to 9 years in 15 to 30 percent of adults.

Who is at risk?

Certain groups are at risk of being infected with hepatitis G. Those at high risk are:

- injecting drug users;
- recipients of infected blood or blood products; and
- haemodialysis patients.

Those at medium risk are people:

- getting tattoos, acupuncture or body piercings with tools that are not sterile;
- with impaired immune response;
- who engage in prostitution; and
- who are homosexuals.

How is it prevented?

Persons who are regularly exposed to blood or blood products from others should protect themselves with gloves to reduce the risk of the spread of viruses.

Those who inject drugs should ensure they use clean, sterile needles and avoid sharing needles, syringes or other drug-use equipment.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis G virus is spread by infected blood or blood products. It can be transmitted by sharing personal items contaminated with the virus, and other similar behaviours including from mother-to-newborn child at birth or by various sexual activities.

Is there any treatment?

There is currently no recommended treatment for hepatitis G.

Information adapted from Blood Safety Surveillance and Health Care Acquired Infections Division of Health Canada (2003).