

Hepatitis C Testing

What to Expect When Getting Tested

All adults, pregnant women, and people with risk factors should get tested for hepatitis C.

Most people who get infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV) develop a chronic, or lifelong, infection. Left untreated, chronic hepatitis C can cause serious health problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death. People can live without symptoms or feeling sick, so testing is the only way to know if you have hepatitis C. Getting tested is important to find out if you are infected so you can get lifesaving treatment that can cure hepatitis C.

Getting tested for hepatitis C

A blood test, called an HCV antibody test, is used to find out if someone has ever been infected with the hepatitis C virus. The HCV antibody test, sometimes called the anti-HCV test, looks for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus in blood. Antibodies are chemicals released into the bloodstream when someone gets infected.

Test results can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks to come back. Rapid anti-HCV tests are available in some health clinics and the results of these tests are available in 20 to 30 minutes.

What does a non-reactive HCV antibody test result mean?

- ➔ A **non-reactive** or negative antibody test means that you are not currently infected with the hepatitis C virus.
- ➔ However, if you think you might have been exposed to hepatitis C in the last 6 months, you will need to be tested again.

What does a reactive HCV antibody test result mean?

- ➔ A **reactive** or positive antibody test means you have been infected with the hepatitis C virus at some point in time.
- ➔ Once people have been infected, they will always have antibodies in their blood. This is true if they have cleared the virus, have been cured, or still have the virus in their blood.
- ➔ A reactive antibody test **does not** necessarily mean that you currently have hepatitis C and a follow-up test is needed.

What to do if the HCV antibody test is reactive

- ➔ If the antibody test is reactive or positive, you need an additional test to see if you currently have hepatitis C. This test is called a nucleic acid test (NAT) for HCV RNA. Another name used for this test is a PCR test.
- ➔ If the NAT for HCV RNA is:
 - **Negative** - you were infected with hepatitis C virus, but the virus is no longer in your body because you were cured or cleared the virus naturally.
 - **Positive** - you now have the virus in your blood.
- ➔ If you have a **reactive** antibody test and a **positive** NAT for HCV RNA, you will need to talk to a doctor about treatment. Treatments are available that can cure most people with hepatitis C in 8 to 12 weeks.



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