***What is Hepatitis C?***

Hepatitis C is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis C virus. When first infected, a person can develop an “acute” infection, which can range in severity from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization.

***How is Hepatitis C spread?***

Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the Hepatitis C virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. Today, most people become infected with Hepatitis C by sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs. Before widespread screening of the blood supply began in 1992, Hepatitis C was also commonly spread through blood transfusions and organ transplants. Although uncommon, outbreaks of Hepatitis C have occurred from blood contamination in medical settings.

***Can a person get Hepatitis C from a tattoo or piercing?***

There is little evidence that Hepatitis C is spread by getting tattoos in licensed, commercial facilities. Whenever tattoos or body piercings are given in informal settings or with non-sterile instruments, transmission of Hepatitis C and other infectious diseases is possible.

***How common is Hepatitis C?***

An estimated 3.2 million people in the United States have chronic Hepatitis C. Most are unaware of their infection. Each year, about 17,000 Americans become infected with Hepatitis C.

***How serious is Hepatitis C?***

Chronic Hepatitis C is a serious disease that can result in long-term health problems, including liver damage, liver failure, and liver cancer. Approximately 12,000 people die every year from Hepatitis C-related liver disease.

***Who should get tested for Hepatitis C?***

Testing for Hepatitis C is recommended for certain groups, including people who:

■ Currently inject drugs

■ Injected drugs in the past, even if it was just once or occurred many years ago

■ Have HIV infection

■ Have abnormal liver tests or liver disease

■ Received donated blood or organs before 1992

■ Have been exposed to blood on the job through a needle stick or injury with a sharp object

■ Are on hemodialysis