

# Hepatitis B and C Fact Sheet



it's time  
for  
a**ction**



## What is hepatitis?

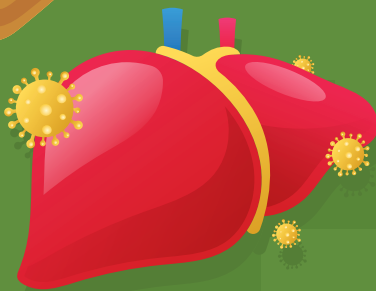
Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. The condition can be self-limiting or can progress to fibrosis (scarring), cirrhosis or liver cancer. Hepatitis viruses are the most common cause of hepatitis in the world but other infections, toxic substances (e.g., alcohol, certain drugs), and autoimmune diseases can also cause hepatitis.

## What are the different hepatitis viruses?

There are 5 main hepatitis viruses, referred to as **types A, B, C, D and E**. These 5 types are of greatest concern because of the burden of illness and death they cause and the potential for outbreaks and epidemic spread. In particular, **types B and C** lead to chronic disease in hundreds of millions of people and, together, are the most common cause of liver cirrhosis and cancer.

## How can hepatitis B and C be transmitted?

**Hepatitis A and E** are typically caused by ingestion of contaminated food or water. **Hepatitis B, C and D** usually occur as a result of parenteral contact with infected body fluids. Common modes of transmission for these viruses include receipt of contaminated blood or blood products, invasive medical procedures using contaminated equipment and for **hepatitis B** transmission from mother to baby at birth, from family member to child, and by sexual contact.



## Why are hepatitis B and C a major health concern for Africa?



**Hepatitis B** is a major health problem for the African Region with 65 million people in 2022<sup>1</sup> chronically infected with the virus. The WHO African Region accounts for 63% of new **Hepatitis B** infections. **Hepatitis B** is an infection of the liver caused by the **hepatitis B** virus which can be acute (short and severe) or chronic (long term). **Hepatitis B** can cause a chronic infection and puts people at high risk of death from cirrhosis and liver cancer. Moreover, most people do not experience any symptoms when newly infected, while some people have acute illness with symptoms that can last several weeks, comprising yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, feeling very tired, nausea, vomiting, pain in the abdomen.

**Hepatitis C** is a viral infection that affects the liver, which can cause both acute (short term) and chronic (long term) illness and be life-threatening. In 2022, 8 million people were living with **hepatitis C** in the African Region<sup>2</sup>. Symptoms can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, and jaundice.

## Why is it important for people to know if they are infected with a form of viral hepatitis?



Early diagnosis provides the best opportunity for effective medical support. It also allows those infected to take steps to prevent transmission of the disease to others, for example by adopting safe sex practices. It allows lifestyle precautions to be undertaken to protect the liver from additional harm, specifically, by eliminating alcohol and certain drugs which are toxic to the liver.

## How can viral hepatitis be prevented?



There are safe and effective vaccines for the prevention of hepatitis B virus (HBV). Screening blood used for transfusion can prevent transmission of HBV and **hepatitis C** virus (HCV). Sterile injection equipment protects against HBV and HCV transmission. Safer sex practices, including minimizing the number of partners and using barrier (condom) protective measures have been shown to protect against HBV and HCV transmission. Harm reduction for injection drug users prevents HBV and HCV transmission.

## How is viral hepatitis treated?



For what concerns acute **hepatitis B** there is no specific treatment, while chronic **hepatitis B** can be treated with medicines. Clinical care for HBV is aimed at maintaining comfort and adequate nutritional balance, including replacement of fluids lost from vomiting and diarrhoea.

Regarding **hepatitis C**, antiviral medications, including sofosbuvir and daclatasvir, are used for treatment. Some people's immune systems can fight the infection on their own and new infections do not always need treatment, while treatment is always needed for chronic **hepatitis C**.

<sup>1</sup> Global hepatitis report 2024: action for access in low- and middle-income countries. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240091672>

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**Where to get tested for hepatitis B and C in Brazzaville?  
Contact the AFRO clinic or your local healthcare provider**