

# From a Hepatitis C Diagnosis to a Cure

All Americans over age 18 should get screened for hep C.

April 3, 2023 By [Tim Murphy](#)

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According to Julius Wilder, MD, PhD, a Black hepatitis expert at the Duke School of Medicine—and in keeping with national guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—all Americans over age 18 should get screened for hep C.

This especially includes baby boomers who may never have injected drugs—hep C’s primary mode of transmission—but who may have been exposed to tattoos, contaminated razors or blood products, such as red blood cells and plasma, via transfusions years ago, before hep C had even been identified. To be tested for hep C, talk to your health provider or your pharmacist (they may be able to test you), or call your local health department.

If you test negative, that’s great—just remember that you could still get hep C if you share injection drug equipment (or even non-injection drug paraphernalia, like a pipe), get a dirty tattoo or have anal sex with bleeding, particularly if you’re HIV positive. (Studies suggest that penile-vaginal intercourse and oral sex do not transmit hep C.)

However, if you are among the roughly 1% of Americans who do test positive for hep C, don’t freak out! “You can be easily cured, so you need to make sure you’re treated right away” is Wilder’s main message. And, unlike with older treatments, it doesn’t really matter if you have a certain amount of liver scarring, which these days can be determined via scanning or a blood test—no painful biopsy necessary. (If you do have scarring, all it means is that you’ll likely still have to have your liver scanned periodically after your hep C is cured.)

More good news? These days, hep C treatment is so easy that you don’t even necessarily have to go to a liver specialist for it—your primary provider could prescribe you a regimen consisting of between one and three pills daily. Usually, says Wilder, you’ll take them for two months. At that point, if labs detect no hep C virus in your blood—as they almost definitely will because current treatment success is nearly 100%—then you go about your life and have your blood checked three months later.

No hep C at that point? (And we can almost guarantee that’ll be the case.) Then you’re cured! “It’s a modern-day medical miracle, given the burden that untreated hep C poses,” says Wilder.

A few more things you should know:

\* You can get hep C again after being cured, so refrain from or take harm reduction precautions against risky behaviors like injection drug use, unregulated tattooing and anal sex that causes bleeding. (Clean needles and condoms are your friends here.)

\* Research has disproved the old idea that someone has to be sober to complete hep C treatment. As long as you can take your hep C meds daily for two months, you can be cured without committing to total abstinence.

\* Tell your family and friends to get tested for hep C. And tell them how easily they can be cured if they do test positive—many folks still think current treatment is like older treatments with horrible side effects that did not even guarantee a cure. Studies have shown that even those who are unstably or intermittently housed can complete the cure regimen—particularly if they have someone who will hold their pills for them.

“It doesn’t matter how you got hep C,” says Wilder. “Everyone should be tested, and everyone deserves a cure.”