Is Sex a Hep C Risk?

Yes, but only in these rare instances.

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Although conflicting reports have created confusion about whether or not hep C is a sexually transmitted disease, the key to staying safe is to understand that the hepatitis C virus (HCV) does have the potential to be spread through sexual contact. Here are the risks and how to avoid them.

Hepatitis C is a serious liver disease caused by a virus that's transmitted through direct contact with the blood of infected people, explains Michael Ryan, MD, clinical professor of medicine at Eastern Virginia Medical School. Hep C can lead to serious liver disease, liver failure or cancer, transplants or even death.

Currently, hep C is responsible for about 15,000 deaths every year, and African Americans are more likely to be chronically infected than other ethnic groups.

Sexual activity is risky if it involves exposure to blood with partners who are living with hep C or whose hep C status isn't known. Examples include prolonged or "rough" anal sex, fisting, sex during menstruation and group sex. The risk appears highest among HIV-positive gay men.

So how can you stay safe from hep C? Always use a condom, Ryan says. They're cheap and readily available and will also protect you from sexually transmitted infections. In addition, avoid injecting drugs or sharing needles. Also, don't share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers or any other items that could have come in contact with even minuscule amounts of blood.

Ryan goes one step further and advises that everyone get tested for hep C—even those who don't think they're at risk. "Ask your doctor specifically about getting tested for hepatitis C today; it's a simple blood test," he says. "Many people live with hep C for decades without knowing it because the disease often has no symptoms."

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/hepatitis-sex-risk-22899-5311