What is hepatitis C?
Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). More than 90% of people never have symptoms, and about 75-85% of those infected will develop chronic, long-term hepatitis C, putting them at risk for cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), cancer of the liver and liver failure.

How is hepatitis C spread?
The virus is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected. HCV is spread through sharing needles or "works" when "shooting" drugs, through needle sticks or sharps exposures on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. The risk of sexual transmission appears to be low. Other persons at risk include kidney dialysis patients and persons who live with someone infected with hepatitis C. Hepatitis C is not spread by sneezing, coughing, hugging, breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, or other casual contact. It is not spread by food or water.

What are symptoms of hepatitis C?
Many people who have hepatitis C have very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. Symptoms may include fever, lack of energy, nausea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, and jaundice (yellow color to the whites of the eyes or skin).

How soon do symptoms appear?
Symptoms of acute hepatitis C usually appear 4-12 weeks after exposure but can appear from 2 weeks to 6 months after exposure.

How is hepatitis C diagnosed?
The virus is diagnosed by blood tests.

What is the treatment for hepatitis C?
The Food and Drug Administration has approved some antiviral drugs for treating chronic hepatitis C. Unfortunately, drug treatment does not help all persons who have hepatitis C. Consult your health care provider for further information. Persons with hepatitis C should avoid alcohol or drug use and use medications (both prescription and non-prescription) only with the approval of their healthcare provider. Check with your provider about all medications you are taking, including nonprescription and herbal remedies.

How long is a person infectious (contagious)?
An infected person is contagious with hepatitis C from one or more weeks before symptoms begin and throughout the acute infection. After they recover from their initial illness, those that develop a chronic infection will continue to carry the virus in their blood and remain contagious for the rest of their lives. Many people with hepatitis C can feel fine for up to 20 years, but even without symptoms, they can still spread hepatitis C to others.
Who should be tested for hepatitis C?
You should be tested if you:
- were born between the years of 1945 and 1965
- ever injected illegal drugs, even one time, or many years ago
- received clotting factor concentrates produced before 1987
- were ever on long-term kidney dialysis
- have persistently abnormal liver enzymes
- were informed that you received blood from a donor who later tested positive for hepatitis C
- received a transfusion of blood, blood components or an organ transplant before July 1992
- received a needle stick exposure to blood infected with hepatitis C virus
- are a child born to a mother infected with hepatitis C

If I have hepatitis C, how can I avoid spreading it to others?
- Do not share needles or other drug equipment.
- Do not donate blood or organs.
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers or any other personal items that might have your blood on them.
- Let health care providers who may be exposed to your blood know that you have hepatitis C
- Although sexual transmission appears to be low, inform your sexual partner that you have hepatitis C and consider using latex condoms or other barriers.
- Cover cuts or open sores on your skin.

Is there a vaccine for hepatitis C?
While there are vaccines available for both hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine against hepatitis C.

Where can I find more information on hepatitis C?
You can find more information on viral hepatitis C at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at [http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/C](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/C). For information on living with chronic hepatitis C you can go to the HCV Advocate website at [http://hcvadvocate.org/](http://hcvadvocate.org/).

Hepatitis C is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.3503, Monday-Friday, 8:00 AM-5:00 PM.