

Perinatal Hepatitis C: Tips for Health Care Providers



Current data for Arizona indicates hepatitis C infections are trending younger and impacting more people of childbearing age. Many people with hepatitis C don't know that they have it. Hepatitis C can cause serious health problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), and liver cancer.

Pregnant patients can pass hepatitis C infection to their babies. As a health care provider, you can help reduce rates of hepatitis C — and ensure pregnant patients get the care they need.



On average, about **300** babies each year are born to people diagnosed with hepatitis C in Arizona.

Test pregnant patients for hepatitis C

Testing for hepatitis C is now **recommended** for all adults age 18 and older once per lifetime — and during every pregnancy. Any person who requests a test should get it, even if they're not considered to be at risk.

Antibody testing

Hepatitis C testing starts with an **antibody test**. A positive result means that the patient has a current or past hepatitis C infection.

PCR testing

If your patient has a positive antibody test, run a **PCR test** for hepatitis C virus (HCV) RNA to confirm current infection.



Arizona Chapter

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Follow testing guidelines

The American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) have created guidelines for hepatitis C testing, available at [HCVGuidelines.org](https://www.hcvguidelines.org).

Report diagnoses to the pediatrician and local health department

If your patient tests positive for hepatitis C, their baby will need to be tested after birth. If possible, contact the family's pediatrician and let them know the baby will need hepatitis C testing. You can report hepatitis C diagnoses to your local health department. For more information, visit the Arizona Department of Health Services webpage on communicable disease reporting: bit.ly/3QDqPKQ.



Did you know that coinfection is possible for syphilis, HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and hepatitis B and C? When you test pregnant patients for hepatitis C, take the opportunity to test for these other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) at the same time.

Talk about treatment plans

Over the past few years, medical advancements have made hepatitis C treatment simpler and more effective. Today, treatment cures hepatitis C in over 95% of cases, and patients don't even need to see a specialist to get the help they need. However, hepatitis C treatment is not approved for use during pregnancy. If your pregnant patient tests positive for hepatitis C, help them **make a plan to start treatment** after they have given birth and finished breastfeeding their baby.

Treatment for children

Encourage pregnant patients who test positive for hepatitis C to talk to their baby's pediatrician about screening and treatment. There are no treatment options available for infants with hepatitis C. However, hepatitis C treatment is approved for **children 3 years and older**.

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Educate parents about hepatitis C prevention

There are approximately 9,000 new reports of hepatitis C each year. Education is the key to prevention! Talk to your patients about:

- Ways to lower their chances of getting hepatitis C, like avoiding the use of nonsterile needles or direct contact with another person's blood
- Their chances of passing hepatitis C along to their baby — of every 100 babies born to a parent with hepatitis C, about 6 of them will develop an acute infection

You can also share these resources:

- **Hep-Free AZ** is Arizona's grassroots volunteer coalition that is fighting to eliminate hepatitis C in Arizona through a community-centered hands-on approach. New members are always welcome. hepfreeaz.org
- **Detailing for Improved Sexual Health in Arizona (DISH-AZ)**
DISH-AZ provides individualized and ongoing connection, education, and support for healthcare providers and staff. hivaz.org/academic-detailing
- **Hepatitis C fact sheet:** bit.ly/3QmfZrt

This easy-to-read fact sheet includes basic facts about hepatitis C and information about prevention, testing, and treatment. Use it to start the conversation about hepatitis C during patient appointments, put a few copies in your waiting room, or post it on your practice's webpage or social media accounts.

- **Information about perinatal harm reduction:**

PerinatalHarmReduction.org

This website provides information about substance use during pregnancy.

