

Perinatal Hepatitis C: Tips for Pediatric 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.

Hepatitis C infection can pass to babies during pregnancy. As a pediatric health care provider, you can ensure babies and children with hepatitis C get the care they need.



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

Test for hepatitis C

Hepatitis C testing is recommended for all babies born to parents with hepatitis C.

PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing

AAP recommends testing infants using a **PCR test** between age **2 to 6 months**. PCR can be used for infants up to 17 months old. If your patient has a positive PCR screening test, refer them to a liver specialist for additional testing:

- Hepatitis C quantitative RNA PCR test (viral load test) to confirm diagnosis
- Hepatitis C genotype testing

The specialist can follow the patient and start treatment if needed.



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Antibody testing

Babies at risk of hepatitis C infection who are **18 months** old or older who have not been screened with a PCR test should be screened with an **antibody test**, followed by PCR testing if the antibody test is positive.

Testing siblings

If 1 child in a family has tested positive for hepatitis C acquired at birth, all of their siblings from the same parent should be tested.



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 local health department

If your patient tests positive for hepatitis C, you can report the diagnosis to your local health department. For more information, visit the Arizona Department of Health Services webpage on communicable disease reporting: bit.ly/3QDqPKQ.

Refer patients for treatment

If your patient screens positive for hepatitis C, refer them to a pediatric infectious disease or liver specialist for follow-up care and treatment.

Treatment for children

There are no treatment options available for infants with hepatitis C. However, hepatitis C treatment is approved for children **age 3 years and older**.

Treatment for adults

If your patient's parent has hepatitis C, encourage them to get treatment, too. Keep in mind that hepatitis C treatment is **not** approved for people who are currently pregnant or breastfeeding — so some parents may need to wait a few months before starting treatment.



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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 patient's parents or caregivers 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. 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.

