Hepatitis C and Incarceration

The frequency of hepatitis C in jails and prisons is significantly higher than in the general population. At least 17% of all inmates have chronic hepatitis C compared to the general population's 1%. With approximately 30% of all people in the United States being incarcerated for at least part of the year, a majority of those are unaware they have hepatitis C.

How did I get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a bloodborne virus; most often it is transmitted from person to person by sharing needles or oth-er similar drug equipment or unsterile tattoo and piercing equipment. It can also be transmitted during sex if there are blood exposures, such as rough sex that tends to lead to tearing of vaginal, penile and anal tissues. If you also have HIV or open sores from a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI), you are more at risk of getting hepatitis C.

Why is the hepatitis C rate so high in inmate populations?

With there being such close living arrangements, and the fact that hepatitis C is not able to be cleaned easily on surfaces, prison settings become an environment for easy spread. Another way it is transmitted is through tattoos. Sharing a tool used to make a tattoo, piercings, or scars while incarcerated increases the chances of hepatitis C being spread.

Cleaning hepatitis C Blood Spills

Bleaching, boiling, burning, or using common cleaning fluids, alcohol, or peroxide will not completely remove the hepatitis C virus from needles, tools, and other surfaces. These methods are not strong enough to kill the hepatitis C virus. The virus can still spread easily from one person to another.

Getting Treatment in Prison

Treatment for hepatitis C while you are incarcerated may be limited. There are many deciding factors as to when you would be treated for hepatitis C, such as if you have symptoms, your current liver health, the length of your sentence or other health issues you may have.

After release there may be programs you can enroll in to assist with the cost of treatment. One program in Alabama is Equal Justice Initiative (EJI). EJI has a health clinic in Montgomery dedicated to those who have recently been released from prison.

- EJI provides free health screenings
- Limited care for many diseases and illnesses
- EJI also has a mobile clinic

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