

HEPATITIS C INFECTION

FINDINGS FROM THE 2012 HIV/AIDS ATTITUDINAL TRACKING SURVEY

The 2012 HIV/AIDS Attitudinal Tracking Survey involved 2,000 randomly selected respondents from Canada, 16 years and older, who were interviewed by telephone to measure awareness, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C. This fact sheet explores key findings related to hepatitis C.

KNOWLEDGE & AWARENESS OF HEPATITIS C IS LOW

- 50% of respondents believe that there is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis C infection.
- Respondents under 25 years of age were more apt to believe a vaccine exists.
- Most respondents could not correctly identify the most common methods of hepatitis C transmission.
 - Only 23% correctly identified injection drug use/sharing drug needles and 1% identified mother to child transmission as common methods.
 - Transmission via vaginal sex is uncommon, but 25% of respondents identified unsafe or unprotected sex between a man and a woman.
 - Blood transfusions were the most commonly cited method of hepatitis transmission, identified by 36% of respondents. Receiving a transfusion in Canada, since the introduction of blood screening in 1990, is now an extremely small risk in Canada.
- Self-rated knowledge levels for hepatitis C are lower than for HIV/AIDS with only 13% of respondents rating themselves as highly knowledgeable about hepatitis C versus 22% for HIV/AIDS.

FACTS ABOUT HEPATITIS C TRANSMISSION

- HCV is a viral infection affecting the liver.
- There is no vaccine to prevent or treat HCV. HCV infections can be treated with medication and in many cases, the virus can be cleared.
- Injection drug use is the most prominent risk factor for HCV transmission. However, there are several other modes of transmission:
 - Exposure to piercing equipment or tattooing ink/equipment in informal settings or with non-sterile equipment
 - An infected mother to her child during pregnancy or delivery
 - Exposure to blood or blood products infected with HCV
 - Although rare, through sharing of contaminated razors, toothbrushes, scissors and nail clippers
 - Sexual transmission is rare; the risk increases when there is the presence and exchange of blood
- Other risk factors for HCV infection:
 - Current or past shared use of drug equipment (inhalant and injection)
 - Incarceration
 - Being on hemodialysis
 - Homelessness
 - Receiving invasive medical or dental care (including blood transfusions) in a setting where universal health precautions are lacking
 - Having received blood or blood products or organ transplants in Canada prior to 1992



PERCEPTION OF GROUPS AT RISK

- Only 27% of respondents correctly name injection drug users as the group most at risk of being infected with hepatitis C.
- 22% see younger people in general as the group most at risk of being infected with hepatitis C.

PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL RISK IS NOT ALWAYS ALIGNED WITH REALITY

- 32% of respondents perceive themselves to be at moderate or high risk of contracting hepatitis C which is nearly 3 times higher than perceived risk of HIV infection (12%).
- Perceived risk is highest among respondents between the ages of 35-44 and tends to decrease over age 45.
- Aboriginal respondents are more likely to feel they are at risk for hepatitis C infection (12%).

PREFERRED INFORMATION SOURCES

- The internet is the preferred source of information for hepatitis C information among survey respondents with 62% of respondents indicating they would go online to find this information.
- 35% of respondents indicated that doctors were the main source of hepatitis C information.

MORE FACTS ABOUT HEPATITIS C

- In 2011, 10,741 cases of HCV were reported through the Canadian Notifiable Disease Surveillance System.
- Between 2005 and 2010, rates of reported cases of HCV infection in males were nearly twice as high as those in females.
- In 2010, the highest rate of reported of HCV infection in males was among those aged 40-59 years; and in females, among those aged 25-29 years.
- Soon after being infected, most people show no signs of infection. When present, signs and symptoms of acute HCV infection may include:
 - Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
 - Loss of appetite
 - Nausea and abdominal pain
 - Dark urine
 - Fatigue
- Although progress may be slow, many HCV infections become chronic hepatitis C.
 - After 10-20 years, chronic hepatitis C can lead to cirrhosis.
 - After 20-40 years, chronic hepatitis C can cause liver cancer.

If you have questions related to the report, please contact: ccdic-clmti@phac-aspc.gc.ca

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the
Minister of Health, 2014

Publication date: October 2014

Cat.: HP40-101/5-2014E-PDF ISBN: 978-1-100-23378-9 Pub.: 130642