

Facts about hepatitis lead to healthier life

By Erin Jones

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month. Do you know the facts about hepatitis and if you may have it?

Hepatitis is a viral infection of the liver. There are three major types: A, B and C. Vaccines are available to protect against Hepatitis A and B, but none are available for Hepatitis C.



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Hepatitis B and C can cause chronic infections that if left untreated can lead to liver damage, liver failure or even cancer. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control, Hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver transplants in this country.

There are 3.2 million people in the US with chronic Hepatitis C and the CDC estimates as many as 75 percent don't know they are infected. Three out of four people with Hepatitis C are baby boomers and the CDC recommends that everyone born between 1945 and 1965 get tested for Hepatitis C. A blood test is the only way to know if you have it.

People are also at higher risk of contracting Hepatitis C if they received a blood transfusion before 1992, shared needles

(even once) and nasal instruments for drug use, had sex with an infected person, or have HIV.

Unvaccinated people are at a higher risk for Hepatitis, especially if they travelled outside the country. While there is no vaccine available to prevent Hepatitis C, Barton Health providers can diagnose Hepatitis C with a blood test and treatment is available.

A new treatment can cure Hepatitis C in eight to twelve weeks. Previous treatments were not as effective and had many side effects, but the new treatment has few or no side effects. One clinical study highlighted in an FDA news release showed cure rates as high as 96 to 99 percent depending on the virus subtype and if previous treatment was given.

People can live with chronic Hepatitis for decades without feeling sick, but the toll on the body can be devastating. Taking medication early to treat chronic hepatitis can decrease the chances of liver damage and liver cancer.

Schedule an appointment with a primary care provider at Barton Community Health Center at 530.543.5623 or Barton Family Medicine at 530.543.5660 to get tested or talk about treatment if you have been diagnosed. You can also visit [cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis](https://www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis) for more information.

Erin Jones was born and raised in South Lake Tahoe and is a family physician at Barton Family Medicine.