



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Hepatitis C and Blood-borne Virus (BBV) testing: we're here to help

Issued by Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

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[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

## 1. What is Hepatitis C and Blood-borne Viruses?

Blood-borne Viruses (BBVs) are carried in a person's blood and other bodily fluids, such as saliva. The three most common are HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), Hepatitis B (Hep B) and Hepatitis C (Hep C). These viruses are rare, but they can cause serious infections that may be life-threatening.

Hep C can affect your liver and cause long term complications, such as hardening (fibrosis) and scarring (cirrhosis), and issues with the way your liver functions.

BBVs are spread when a person comes into contact with the blood or bodily fluids of someone with a BBV.

Anyone can have a BBV, but we know that some people are at higher risk, including people who have injected drugs in the past, and have shared needles or other equipment. Other risk factors include using unsterilized tattoo/piercing equipment and unprotected sex with someone who has a BBV.

## 2. Why is it important to be tested for BBVs?

If you do have a BBV, it is important to know about it so you can start the treatment you need to protect your health and to reduce the risk of passing the infection on.

The new Hep C treatments available on the NHS are able to cure the infection and are very different to the older drugs you may have heard negative stories about. They are taken in tablet form, not injections, over a much shorter period of time, and have fewer side effects.

In terms of other BBVs, treatments for Hep B and HIV are improving all of the time. Most people with HIV will lead long and healthy lives, and those who are stable on long-term HIV treatment are also unable to pass the infection on to other people.

### 3. I don't have any symptoms, so do I need a test?

Sometimes the symptoms of BBVs don't appear until months or years after a person has been exposed, even though they cause damage from the moment of infection. As many as 5 in 10 people with Hep C infection in the UK don't know they have the virus, so we are offering more testing to people in the community to help identify those who may be living with a BBV and not realise.

With modern treatments, these diseases can be treated very effectively, and the earlier treatments are started, the better the results. Modern treatments are very different from the older drugs like Interferon that you may have heard negative stories about.

### 4. I've had Hep C before, so do I need to be tested?

If you have previously been treated for Hep C you should still think about being tested again if there is a chance that you've been exposed to the virus again, and we can also test you for other BBVs. Unlike Hep B, Hep C treatment can cure the infection but does not provide immunity to stop you getting it again, and you should be tested whenever you're worried that you've been exposed to a BBV.

### 5. How do you test for BBVs?

There are two different types of test that we can use to test for Hep C today:

- An oral fluid test uses a small amount of saliva to quickly identify (approx. 20 minutes) whether someone has antibodies for Hep C and needs further testing
- A dry blood spot (DBS) test uses a small amount of blood from the fingertip, not a vein, to test for Hep C antibodies and virus, Hep B and HIV. We will not be able to give you a result straight away with this test, but will discuss how you wish to be contacted with your results

It is also possible to have a standard blood test (e.g. from a vein) and, like the DBS test, one sample can be used to perform several tests e.g. Hep C antibodies, Hep C virus, Hep B and HIV. However, we find that most people in community settings like the one you're attending today, prefer the oral fluid test and DBS.

## 6. Can I have some more information about Hep C and the test?

Yes. of course. We will be happy to answer any questions you have about Hep C and BBV testing.

The person taking the test will discuss everything with you and ask you to give your consent to be tested. You will also be asked to agree to us sharing your results with your GP and the local HIV and/or Hepatitis teams to arrange treatment if your results come back positive.

If you decide that you don't want to be tested today then that is fine. If you change your mind at any point then please speak to your NRP worker, and they can support you to access testing. If you're ever concerned in the future that you may have been exposed to a BBV then you should seek medical advice quickly, as prompt treatment is the best way to protect your health and reduce the risk of you passing the infection on to others.

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust offers services such as including BBV testing from several local locations. As well as general sexual health advice and support, they can offer testing for a range of infections including BBVs. You can contact them on **01670 515151** or online at <https://www.northumbria.nhs.uk/our-services/sexual-health-services/> for more information on the free NHS services that they offer, to book an appointment or access the live chat. Consultations could take place by phone, at the One-to-One Centre in Morpeth, or at one of the locations in Berwick, Amble, Hexham, Wooler and others, depending on what suits you and the issue you're calling about.







## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

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