

## Viral Hepatitis C



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**SUMMARY:** *The review summarises the basic knowledge about the epidemiology of viral hepatitis C, its viral agent, and the methods used for its detection. Particular attention is paid to the guidelines for the treatment of both acute and chronic hepatitis C. The basic epidemiological data and specific features concerning former and present injecting drug users are also discussed. The causative agent of hepatitis C is an RNA virus called Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), which belongs to the Flaviviridae family. Historically, the most prevalent mode of transmission has been parenteral exposure to blood products. Currently, the majority of newly acquired infections are connected to injecting drug use. The detection of anti-HCV antibodies is a principal serological test for HCV infection. The reactivity of anti-HCV means exposure to HCV; these antibodies are not seroprotective. Active infection is confirmed by the presence of HCV RNA in full blood by polymerase chain reaction (in real time, preferably). The natural course of infection is influenced by viral, host-related, and external factors. It is very difficult, or rather impossible, to evaluate the influence of these complex factors in each individual case. The standard antiviral treatment is based on a combination of pegylated interferon with ribavirin. The efficacy of such an approach, measured as a sustained virological response rate, is 60%.*

**KEY WORDS:** HEPATITIS C VIRUS – VIRAL HEPATITIS C – INTERFERON – RIBAVIRIN – INJECTION DRUG USE

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