



## *Hepatitis Awareness*

As defined by the [World Health Organization](#), hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis is a condition which can be self-limiting or can progress to fibrosis (scarring), cirrhosis or liver cancer. Midwest GI, [Center for Disease Control](#) (CDC) and other public health partners work to shed light on this hidden epidemic by raising awareness of viral hepatitis and encouraging priority populations to get tested.



According to the [American Liver Foundation](#), toxins, certain drugs, heavy alcohol use, bacterial infection and viral infections can all cause hepatitis. The three main types of viral hepatitis include hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. While each form of hepatitis can produce similar symptoms, each hepatitis virus affects the liver differently, has different routes of transmission, and has different populations that are commonly affected. There are also autoimmune hepatitis and alcoholic hepatitis.

The CDC currently has a campaign promoting awareness of [hepatitis C for baby boomers](#), or people born from 1945-1965. Hepatitis C is an infection caused by the hepatitis C virus. According to the CDC, baby boomers are 5 times as likely to have hepatitis C and 75% of people with hepatitis C were born from 1945 to 1965. The CDC recommends everyone born during these years get tested for hepatitis C.

The reason people born from 1945–1965 have high rates of hepatitis C is not completely understood. However, hepatitis C was not discovered until 1989. According to Susie, RN, Midwest GI's Hepatitis C Coordinator, "Baby boomers grew up in the time when hepatitis C was not known and there were no restrictions on blood products. There was no testing on blood being transfused for medical purposes or the current standards that we are aware of now for sterilizing certain medical/dental appliances."

The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to be tested. A blood test, called a hepatitis C antibody test, can tell if a person has ever been infected with the hepatitis C virus. Susie continues, "Hepatitis C is a long term condition. Hepatitis C does not discriminate between males and females and with the advances of treatment there is no reason you should not be tested."

Individuals who have hepatitis C should see a gastroenterologist. The physicians of Midwest GI are liver disease specialists and treat all liver diseases and all causes of hepatitis. "It is important to make sure there are no other chronic liver diseases, as well as to make sure they have been tested properly for the correct genotype and to stage the severity of their liver disease as this can affect their outcome to treatment."

Treatment for hepatitis C is currently treated with oral medications taken daily from 8 to 24 weeks. Susie says, "There are multiple sub-types of Hepatitis C called genotypes. This is found through specialized blood work. Based on the genotype, if you have cirrhosis or end stage liver disease, or if you have ever been treated for hepatitis C in the past, will determine how long the treatment length is."

For more information about hepatitis or to get tested for hepatitis, talk to your gastroenterologist. You can also utilize the CDC [Hepatitis Risk Assessment](#) for additional information.