

# Idaho Falls Pediatrics

## **Hepatitis C: Children Infected at Birth**

### **What is hepatitis C?**

Hepatitis C is a viral infection of the liver. The liver becomes inflamed.

### **What is the cause?**

Hepatitis C is caused by a virus. The virus is spread through contact with infected blood. Adults can get hepatitis C from sharing razors or needles, having unprotected sex with someone infected with hepatitis C, or blood transfusions. Babies can be exposed to mother's blood during pregnancy, especially during birth. Casual contact, including contact in daycare, does not cause hepatitis C.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

About one in twenty babies born to mothers infected with hepatitis C will get the infection. The baby may be tested for hepatitis C antibodies after birth. Because mothers give their own antibodies to their fetus, the baby after delivery will have these antibodies. This is normal and does not mean the child has the infection. It takes many months to know if your child is truly infected.

After about 18 months, it is important to have your toddler tested for hepatitis C. If the toddler does not have the disease, the antibodies will all be gone. If the baby has the disease, the test will show hepatitis C antibodies.

Another way to check for hepatitis C in babies is to check for the virus itself (not antibodies). This can be done with a blood test called RT-PCR (reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction).

It is not known whether hepatitis C is passed through breast milk. However, it is recommended that you do not breast-feed if you have a cracked or bleeding nipple.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of hepatitis C may be mild or there may be no symptoms at all. Symptoms, when present, may include:

- loss of appetite
- tiredness
- fever
- nausea.

## **How is it treated?**

There are new treatments for hepatitis C, but in children they still are considered experimental. If your child has hepatitis C, he or she should be referred to a liver specialist. The specialist will talk with you about risks and benefits of treatment. Children will need to visit their health care providers often for blood tests and physical exams.

Contact your child's health care provider if:

- Your child's appetite continues to decrease.
- Your child has worsening tiredness.
- Your child has vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal pain.
- Your child develops jaundice.
- You have additional questions about hepatitis C infection.

\*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or call the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.