Family Tree

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Hep C's siblings

Hepatitis C is just one of a family of viruses that cause liver inflammation. (There are also noninfectious causes of hepatitis, including advanced alcoholism and use of certain street drugs and medications.) As science has become more sophisticated, we have learned more about the still-growing number of viruses that cause variations of the disease. Each virus has its own pattern of transmission, disease progression and medical intervention -- but generally similar symptoms. Here are hep C's siblings:

Hepatitis A: Passed through improper sanitation and food handling, and sex. Symptoms range from barely noticeable to severe, requiring hospitalization. Ninety-eight percent recover with no therapy other than rest. Vaccine is available and strongly recommended for people also infected with hep C.

Hepatitis B: Transmitted sexually and through blood products. A significant proportion of people with HIV has active HBV infection or has recovered from it. Alpha interferon is approved therapy; 3TC and possibly other anti-HIV medications appear to have a favorable impact. Preventive vaccination is highly recommended for those at risk.

Hepatitis D: Aggressive but not widespread; can only replicate in the presence of HBV and appears to be transmitted the same ways.

Hepatitis E: Similar to HAV in transmission and symptoms. Most recover with rest and no therapy (except for pregnant women, in whom infection may become severe).

Hepatitis G: The current catch-all for virus that does not appear to be particularly serious.

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