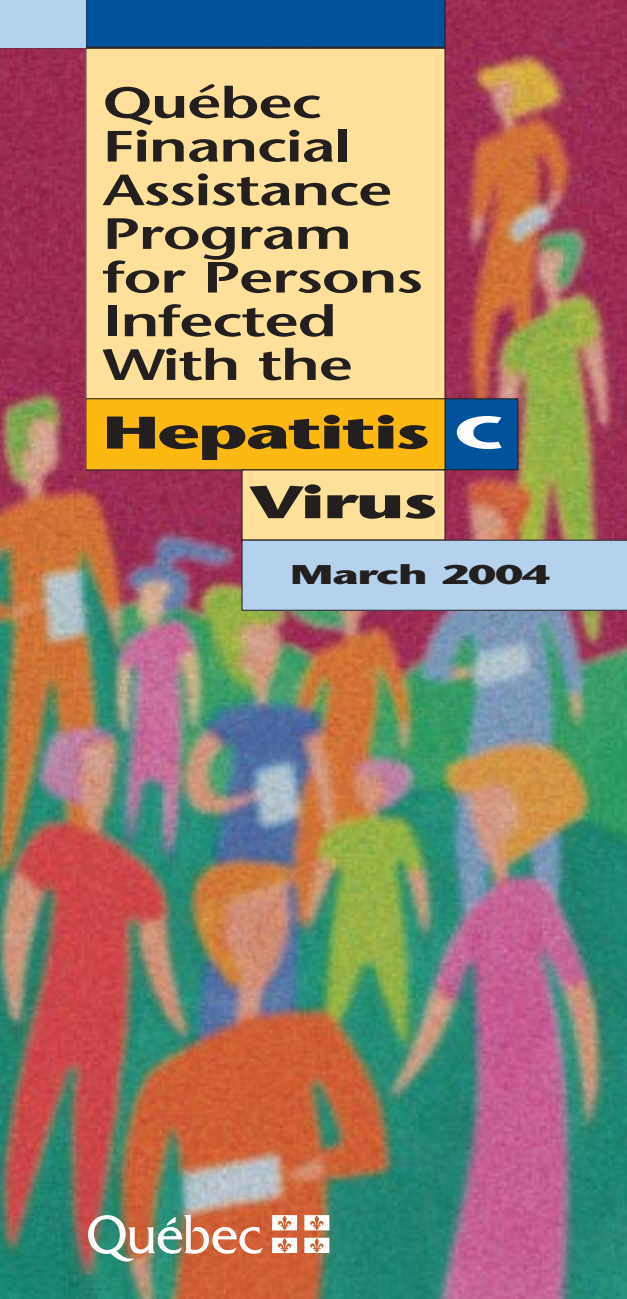




**Québec
Financial
Assistance
Program
for Persons
Infected
With the**

Hepatitis C

Virus

March 2004

The Québec government is offering financial assistance to people infected with the hepatitis C virus as a result of a blood transfusion or the administration of blood products in Québec before January 1, 1986 or between July 2, 1990 and September 28, 1998.

People who contracted the virus between January 1, 1986 and July 1, 1990 as a result of a blood transfusion or the administration of blood products are covered by a federal-provincial-territorial settlement, to which the Québec government contributes, but which is overseen by an independent administrator appointed by the courts.

The aim of this pamphlet is to answer the most frequently asked questions.

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by a virus which was first identified in 1989. The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is mainly transmitted by blood to blood contact with an infected person. Since the disease develops very slowly, many people may remain unaware that they have been infected with HCV for several years.

People infected with hepatitis C often have no symptoms. Others have symptoms such as fatigue, loss of appetite and jaundice. For some people, hepatitis C may lead to cirrhosis and sometimes liver cancer. There is currently no vaccine to protect against hepatitis C, but certain treatments can sometimes slow the progression of the infection.

How do people become infected with hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is most often transmitted through the sharing of injection drug materials among injection drug users. It may also be contracted through the sharing of non-injection drug materials, or when tattooing, body-piercing, electrolysis or acupuncture is done under conditions of inadequate disinfection. Transmission through sexual intercourse appears to be quite rare, as does transmission from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy or at birth.

Some people have also contracted hepatitis C as a result of a blood transfusion or the administration of blood products, especially before 1990. Nowadays, there is virtually no risk of contracting the disease in this way, given the precautions that have been taken to detect HCV in blood donors and blood units.

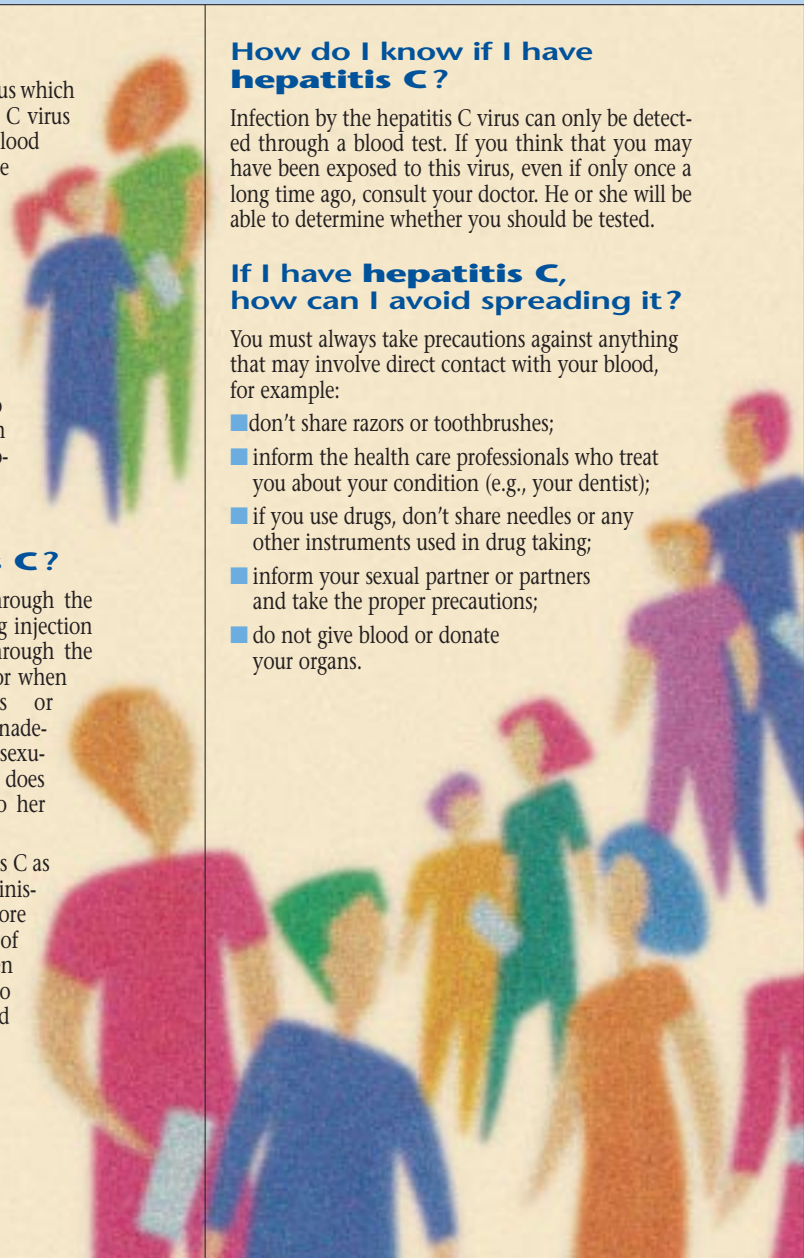
How do I know if I have hepatitis C?

Infection by the hepatitis C virus can only be detected through a blood test. If you think that you may have been exposed to this virus, even if only once a long time ago, consult your doctor. He or she will be able to determine whether you should be tested.

If I have hepatitis C, how can I avoid spreading it?

You must always take precautions against anything that may involve direct contact with your blood, for example:

- don't share razors or toothbrushes;
- inform the health care professionals who treat you about your condition (e.g., your dentist);
- if you use drugs, don't share needles or any other instruments used in drug taking;
- inform your sexual partner or partners and take the proper precautions;
- do not give blood or donate your organs.



Who is eligible for assistance under the Québec Financial Assistance Program for Persons Infected With the Hepatitis C Virus?

You may be eligible for assistance under the Québec Financial Assistance Program if you contracted hepatitis C before January 1, 1986 or between July 2, 1990 and September 28, 1998:

- either directly, as a result of a blood transfusion or the administration of blood products in Québec;
- or indirectly, from your spouse, father or mother, who contracted the disease as a result of a blood transfusion or the administration of blood products in Québec.

How do I apply for financial assistance?

- If your HCV infection has already been identified and confirmed by an appropriate test, you should:
 1. fill out Part A and Part B of the financial assistance application form;
 2. consult the doctor who is most familiar with your state of health and ask him/her to fill out Part B of the form;
 3. sign, date and return the form in the return envelope.
- If you think that you may have contracted HCV but you aren't sure, you should first consult your doctor, who will determine if you should be tested. If the test confirms that you do have hepatitis C, you should then follow steps (1), (2) and (3) above.

By signing the form, you are authorizing the doctors and hospitals whom you mention on the form to provide the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec with information and certain documents (such as transfusion records and the result of the HCV screening test) that concern you. This information is in your personal medical record and is related to your hepatitis C infection and your application for financial assistance. The Régie may contact Héma-Québec to verify that HCV was in fact found in one of the blood units that you received. If the records are incomplete or unavailable, the Régie may contact your doctor and the Laboratoire de santé publique du Québec to obtain additional information in order to determine whether or not you are eligible for financial assistance.

Once completed, the form should be signed, dated and returned to the following address:

Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec
P.O. Box 18000
Québec (Québec) G1K 9H1



Will the information that I send to the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec be kept confidential?

Yes, all the information that you send to the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec, or which is transmitted to the Régie by doctors, hospitals, the Laboratoire de santé publique du Québec or Héma-Québec will be used only for the purposes of the Québec Intervention Program for Persons Infected With the Hepatitis C Virus. The information will be governed by the strict rules of the Act respecting Access to documents held by public bodies and the protection of personal information.

How much financial assistance will I receive?

Every individual considered eligible for assistance under the Québec Financial Assistance Program for Persons Infected With the Hepatitis C Virus will receive a fixed amount of \$24,500.

People covered by the federal-provincial-territorial settlement, to which Québec contributes, will receive different amounts depending on the stage of their disease.

It should be noted that a person who is eligible for the compensation provided for under the federal-provincial-territorial settlement is not eligible for assistance under the Québec Financial Assistance Program.

To obtain the \$24,500 in financial assistance, must I waive the right to any other recourse?

Yes. By accepting the amount of financial assistance offered, individuals automatically release the Government of Québec from all cause of action, obligation, claims or

requests of any nature whatsoever. To this effect, they can refer to the judgment rendered in the Superior Court of Québec on 27 January 2004 in the case of Pontbriand vs Le Procureur général du Québec. A copy of this judgment is available on the following Web site: www.jugements.qc.ca

All individuals eligible for the financial assistance offered by Québec are deemed to be included in the aforementioned judgement.

However, they can choose to opt out within six months of the date on which they become aware of their infection, by 30 June 2010 at the latest. To do so, an individual must notify in writing the Registrar of the Superior Court, District of Montréal.

When will I receive my payment?

As soon as the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec receives all the necessary information and documents attesting to your eligibility for financial assistance, it will start issuing your cheque. The time between receipt of your completed application form and the issuance of your cheque will depend on how long it takes the various persons involved to provide the required information and documents.

Will this amount have an effect on social assistance benefits?

No, this amount will not have any effect on your eligibility for social assistance or the amounts to which you are entitled.

Is the amount taxable?

The Québec government and the Canada government will not tax any financial assistance that you receive under this program.

If I contracted HCV from another person and not directly from a transfusion or blood product, can I still apply for financial assistance?

Yes, if it is established that your spouse, father or mother was infected as a result of a blood transfusion or the administration of blood products in Québec, and that you then contracted the disease from them.

Can an application be filed on behalf of a deceased person?

Yes, if this person contracted an HCV infection through a blood transfusion or the administration of blood products in Québec.

You may contact the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec with regard to the Québec Financial Assistance Program for Persons Infected With the Hepatitis C Virus:

- to obtain an application form for financial assistance;
- to receive help filling out the form;
- for any other questions about the financial assistance program.

Simply call one of the following numbers:

Québec: (418) 646-4636
Montréal: (514) 864-3411
Elsewhere in Québec (toll-free): 1 800 561-9749
or TDD (telecommunications device for the deaf):
Québec: (418) 682-3939
Elsewhere in Québec (toll-free): 1 800 361-3939

For information about the federal-provincial-territorial settlement, dial the following toll-free number:
1 877 434-0944

The information in this pamphlet is not exhaustive. It does not apply to all special cases and does not have force of law. This pamphlet was prepared in collaboration with the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec.

Ce dépliant est disponible en français.