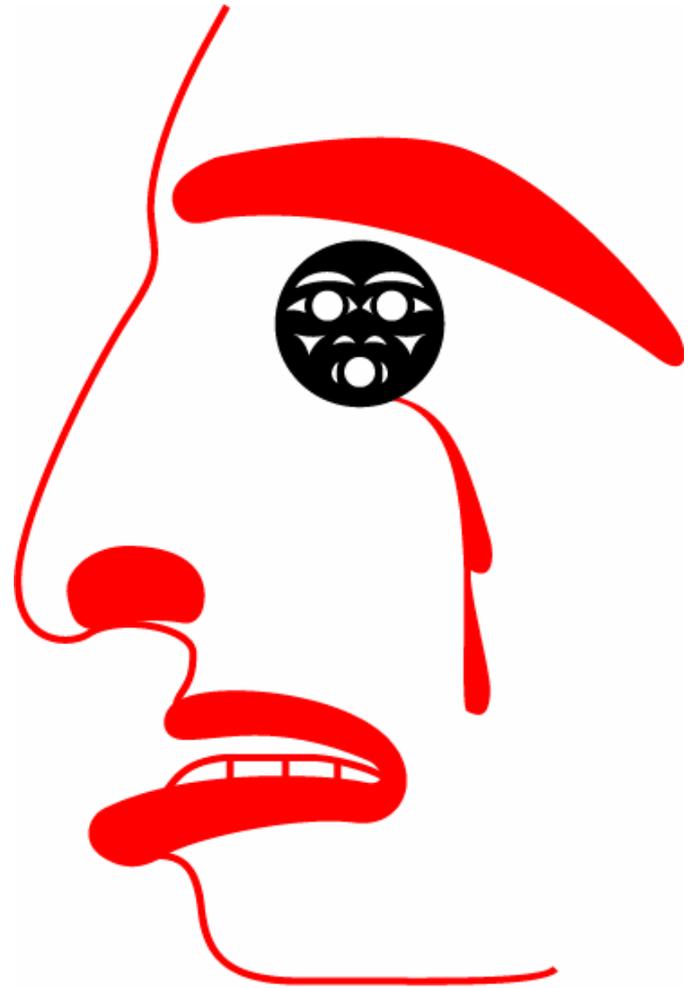


# Why are Aboriginal People at risk for Hepatitis C?

- Residential School Syndrome
- Sexual Abuse
- Low Self Esteem
- Isolation
- IV drug use
- Time in prison
- Tattooing
- Poor access to health services



*The Grieving Mask represents the sense of sorrow many people feel over the circumstances that have put Aboriginal people at high risk.*

# National Study

- Hep C infection is about 7 times higher in the Aboriginal population
  - (Incidence of acute Hepatitis C in the Canadian Aboriginal Population, 1999-2000)

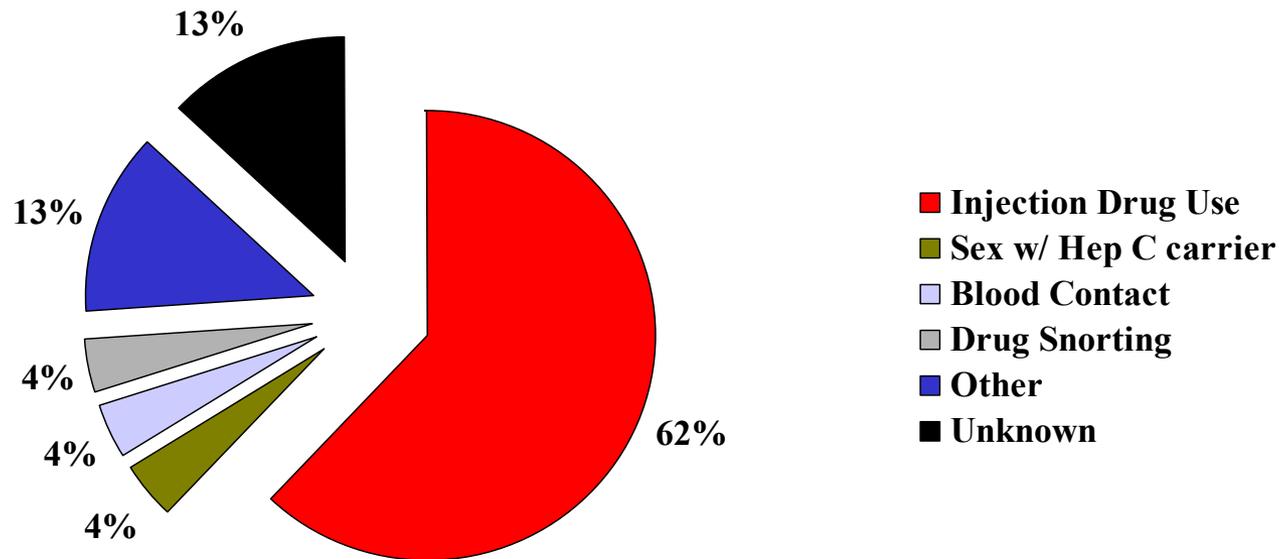
# Aboriginal Hepatitis Stats

- Warren D Hill, BC Hepatitis Services, BC Centre for Disease Control
- Community HCV prevalence rates from 1992-2000
- Grouped BC into 200 areas around cities
- Correlation between higher than average HCV rates and communities with higher than average number of Aboriginal people

# VIDUS

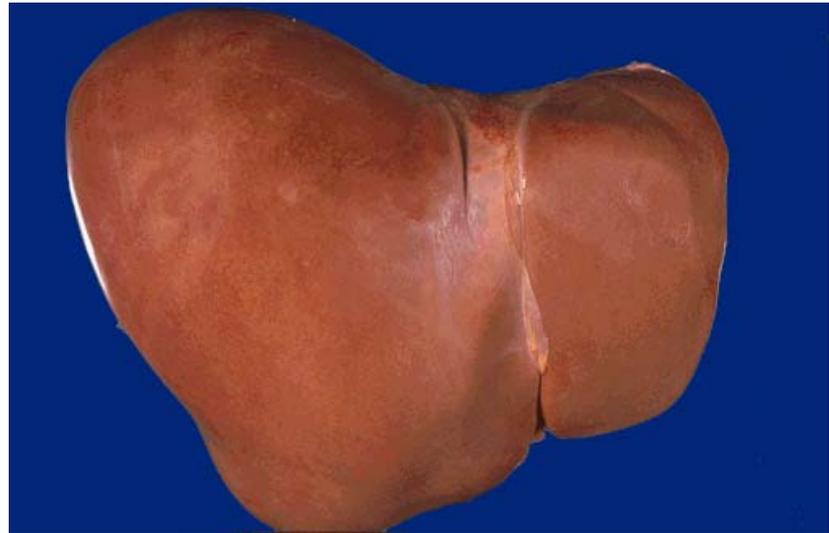
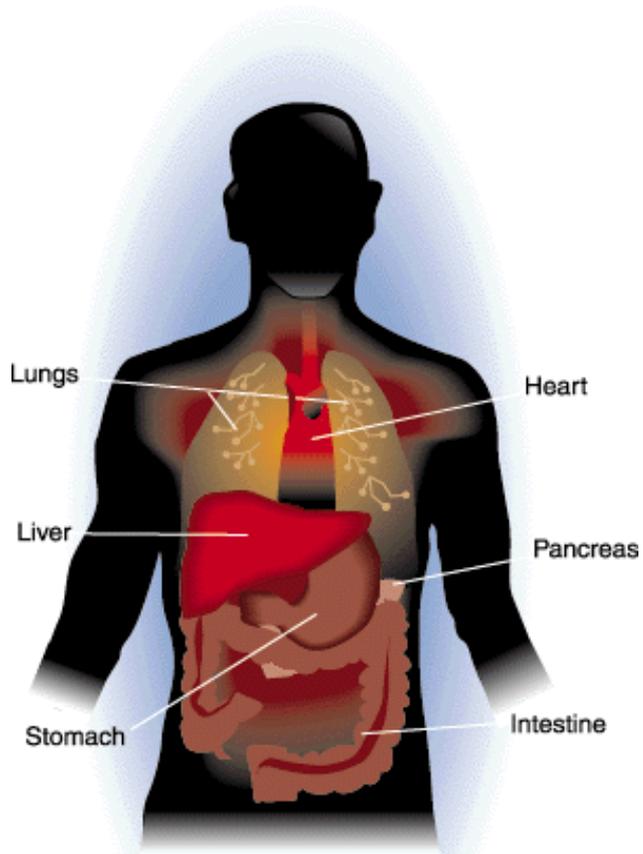
- Out of 1437 injection drug users
- Current HCV prevalence is 87.5%
- 362 are Aboriginal, 339 are HCV positive (94%)
- 232 youth in VIDUS, 143 (62%) are HCV positive
- 56 (24%) are Aboriginal, 47 Aboriginal youth (84%) are HCV positive

# Hep C Risk Factors among Aboriginal People (N=23)



Source: Forrester et al. 2002, Health Canada Enhanced Surveillance Project

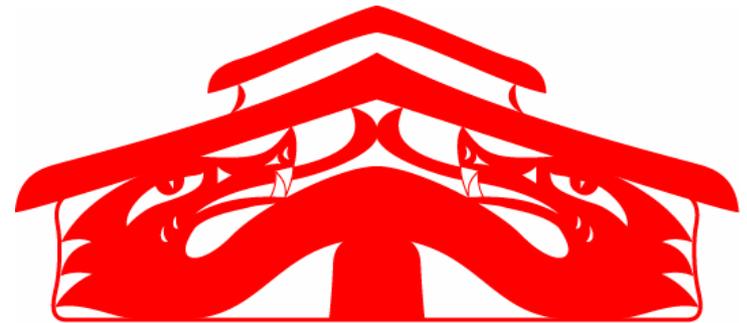
# The Liver



“Football size”

# What Does a Healthy Liver Do?

- Makes nutrients
- Clears out harmful things (drugs, alcohol)
- Clotting
- Hormones
- Keeps your body healthy

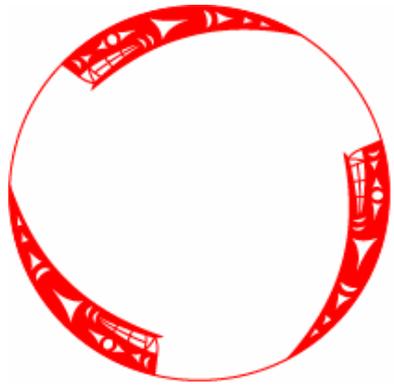


*The Healing House: a traditional coastal longhouse. The serpents on the front represents "cleansing" in some First Nations cultures. The serpents can also represent, here, the Caduceus, the symbol of western medicine.*

# What is Hepatitis C Virus?

- Virus that is spread blood to blood
- Hep C virus reproduces in the liver and damages it
- “hepat” (liver) + “itis” (inflammation)
- No vaccine





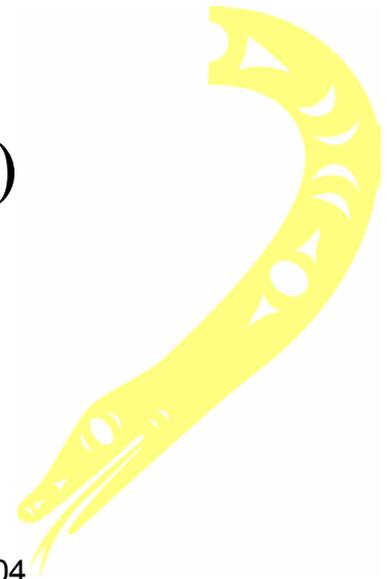
*Spirit Bear: Among some First Nation cultures, bear represents strength and agility. The White Spirit Bear of coastal British Columbia, legend says, was created by Raven as a reminder of the last ice age and represents peace and harmony.*

# Transmission

- Usually blood to blood
- Very low risk through breast milk, semen, or vaginal secretions
- Hep C virus + Opening into Bloodstream + Risk Behavior = Risk of Infection

# Risk Activities

- Sharing needles, works, spoon, cotton, water
- Sharing crack pipes or snorting equipment
- Blood transfusions prior to 1990
- Sharing razors, toothbrushes, nail files and nail clippers
- Tattooing, piercing, ritual cuttings (shared)
- Mother to baby (very low risk)
- Unprotected Sex (very low risk)



# Hepatitis C not spread by:

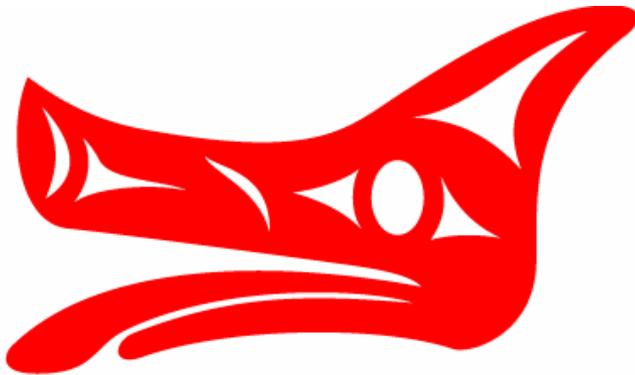
- Sneezing, coughing
- Shaking hands
- Sharing forks, cups
- Mosquitoes
- Spit, pee, poo, vomit
- Toilet seats
- Sweats



*Sacred Sweat: The eagle and the wolf, symbols of power and family form the walls of the sweat lodge. The heated stones, thrown up from centre of Mother Earth, are the Grandmothers, the caregivers.*

# Symptoms

- Fatigue
- Jaundice
- Nausea
- Muscle and joint pain
- Swollen hands and feet
- Trouble sleeping
- Dark urine
- Light colored poo



*Wolf: for many First Nation cultures, wolf represents family and togetherness.*

**Hepatitis C affects each person differently. Only about 25% will experience symptoms.**

# Effective Treatment is Available

## Infection

Hepatitis C virus enters the bloodstream, attaches to liver cells and infects them

New virus made in infected liver cells, invades more liver cells and infects them

15 to 25% of people infected will clear the virus from their bodies without treatment

75 to 85% of people will remain infected. They may be at risk for complications

Infected liver cells become Inflamed

Inflammation causes liver cells to die

Dead liver cells causes scarring of the liver; this is called fibrosis

Fibrosis takes a long time to develop. A lot of scar tissue means that hepatitis C virus has been present for ten years or more

## Cirrhosis?

Some people may develop liver cancer or require a liver transplant

Cirrhosis affects how blood flows through liver. The liver doesn't work as well

In 20 to 30% of people with long-term infection, fibrosis can lead to cirrhosis of the liver.

## Fibrosis?

## Inflammation



# Infection

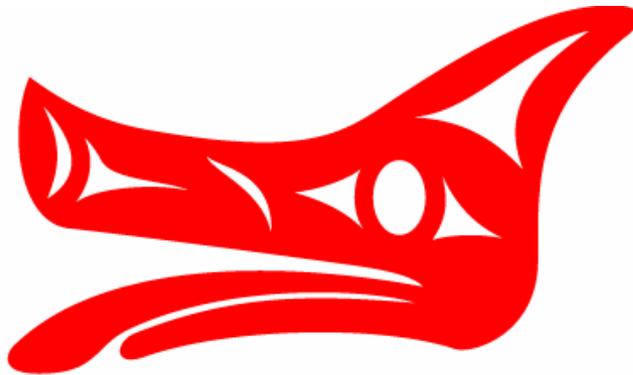
- Hep C enters blood and infects liver cells
- New virus made in liver cells
- 25% of people will clear the virus
- About 75% of people remain infected



*Sacred Sweat: The eagle and the wolf, symbols of power and family form the walls of the sweat lodge. The heated stones, thrown up from centre of Mother Earth, are the Grandmothers, the caregivers.*

# Inflammation

- Infected liver cells become inflamed
- Inflammation causes liver cells to die
- Dead liver cells cause scarring of the liver



*Wolf: for many First Nation cultures, wolf represents family and togetherness.*

# Fibrosis?



- Fibrosis=Scarring of the liver
- Long time to develop
- A lot of scar tissue means virus present < 10 years
- Drinking alcohol makes the liver worse

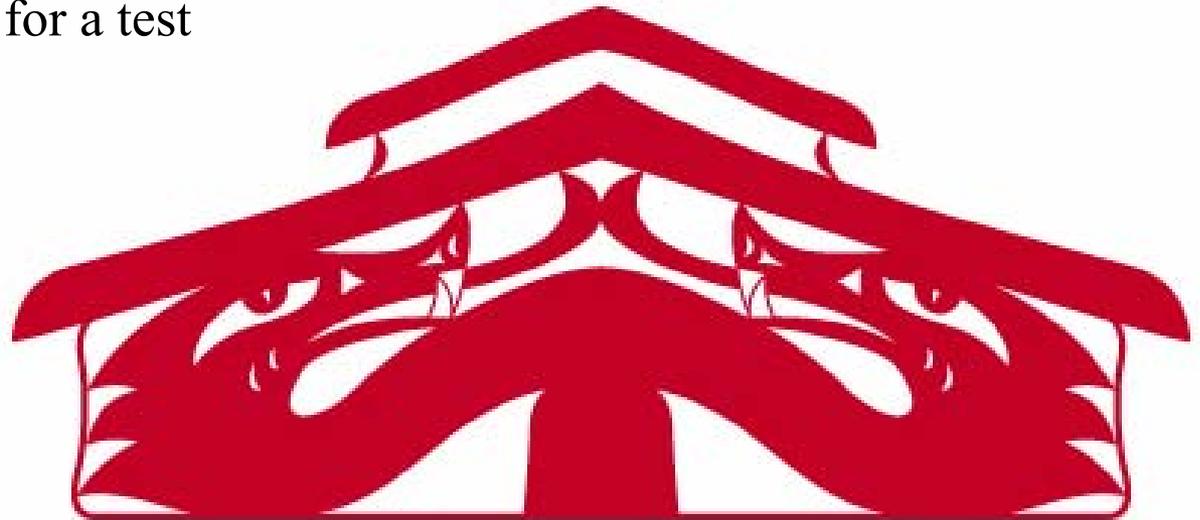
# Cirrhosis?=80% of liver scarred



- 20-30% of people with long term infection may lead to cirrhosis
- Affects how blood flows through liver
- Liver doesn't work well
- Some people may develop liver cancer
- Some may need a transplant
- Treatment can cure some people

# Testing

- Testing is important to confirm you have hepatitis and to monitor your progress during and after treatment
- Go to Doctor or Clinic for a test
- They will draw blood
- Testing is confidential



# Living with Hepatitis C

- Avoid alcohol
- Rest, eat healthy
- Exercise
- Sense of humor
- See doctor regularly
- Bandage cuts
- Hepatitis A and B Vaccine
- Talk to pharmacist/doctor about drug interactions
- Only use tylenol if doctor says ok



# Co infection

- Infected with more than one virus
- Ex HIV + Hepatitis C
- HIV may make Hepatitis C worse
- Treatment for HIV may damage liver
- May have Hepatitis A, B, and C
- Having Hepatitis A and C is bad (get vaccinated for A and B)



*The hepatitis C ribbon represents our dedication to the memory of those who have passed and our commitment to the struggle to defeat this disease.*

# Treatment of Hepatitis C

- Pegylated interferon and ribavirin
- Two forms are available: Pegetron and Pegasys.
- Ribavirin capsules twice daily and pegylated interferon injection once a week.



Wolf for many First Nation cultures, wolf represents family and togetherness.

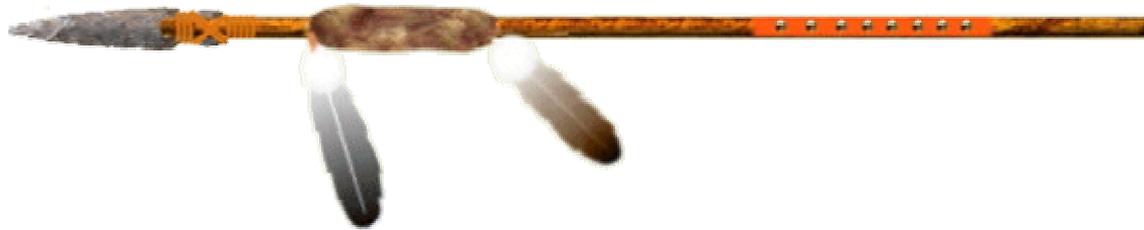
# Treatment



- **Pegylated interferon and ribavirin**
  - 45% cure with genotype 1
  - 75% cure with genotype 2, 3
- Cure is measured by:
- **SVR** = sustained virological response = no HCV virus in the blood 6 months after all therapy is stopped.

# When Start, How Long?

- Start therapy when ALT level more than 1.5X normal on 3 consecutive occasions over 3 months.
- **Genotype 1** response rate better with 48 weeks of therapy.
- **Genotype 2, 3** can stop treatment after 24 weeks.



# Side Effects

- **Interferon:** flu like, irritable, fatigue, depression, insomnia, decreased appetite, lower white blood cell count
- **Ribavirin:** anemia, shortness of breath, rashes, itching (cannot be used in pregnancy because it could damage the infant)
- Treatment makes you feel bad, make sure you are ready for it.



# Standard Precautions



*The hepatitis C ribbon represents our dedication to the memory of those who have passed and our commitment to the struggle to defeat this disease.*

- Preventing contact with blood or body fluids of others
- Dispose of used needles properly
- Wear latex gloves when cleaning up blood
- Use household bleach (or other cleaning agent like lysol) and water to clean up blood spills
- Teach others, especially children

**Spiritual**

Prayer, Meditation, Smudging,  
Belief in the creator, The eagle feather,  
Traditional ceremonies, Singing, Dancing,  
Drumming, A connection with Mother Earth,  
Sweat lodge and the longhouse, Belief in self

**Emotional**

Love, Respect, Joy  
Caring, Laughter  
Support groups  
Stress management  
Self esteem and worth  
Support from family and friends  
Acceptance by the community  
Able to enjoy life with loved ones  
Able to contribute to family and community  
Feels cherished and accepted

Easy access to medical services  
A clean safe place to live  
Good nutrition and  
physical exercise  
Nutritional supplements  
Help with addictions  
Financial assistance  
Alternate therapies  
Adequate rest  
Relief from symptoms

**Physical**

Understanding hepatitis C Virus  
Knowing about treatment options  
Adapting to the changes that hepatitis C  
virus causes in the body  
Learning how to protect self  
Sharing information with others  
Aware of services available for  
hepatitis C infected people  
Living positively

**Mental**

*Spirit Bear: Among some First Nation cultures, bear represents strength and agility. The White Spirit Bear of coastal British Columbia, legend says, was created by Raven as a reminder of the last ice age and represents peace and harmony.*

**Chee Mamuk**, Aboriginal Program, STD/AIDS Division, BC Centre for Disease Control, 2004

# Resources

- **Chee Mamuk**, BCCDC
- Red Road HIV/AIDS Network
- Healing Our Spirit
- BC Women's, Aboriginal Health Program
- Canadian Liver Foundation
- BC Centre for Disease Control Hepatitis Services
- Help Line 1800 707 6430