

New hepatitis C treatments more effective, tolerable: FDA

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(HealthDay)—Hepatitis C can be cured in about three months, allowing

people with the viral disease to live longer, healthier lives, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says.

Drugs used to clear the virus from the body are not only more effective than they once were but also more tolerable for [patients](#), according to Dr. Jeffrey Murray, an internist at the FDA who specializes in infectious diseases.

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver that is caused by different viruses. In the United States, hepatitis C is the most common chronic bloodborne infection. Avoiding risky behaviors, such as sharing drug needles, can help prevent the spread of the disease, but there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

Hepatitis is often a silent disease. Many people are unaware they are infected for years and learn about their infection only after they have developed serious liver disease or failure.

Three-quarters of Americans with [chronic hepatitis C](#) are baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1965). Many became infected before the virus was identified and the blood supply was screened, according to the FDA.

"Hepatitis C is a bit like smoking, the longer you've had it, the higher your risk of developing complications—in this case, [liver cancer](#), cirrhosis [liver scarring] and end-stage liver disease. It's a progressive [disease](#) that takes years, even decades, before the patient develops cirrhosis or cancer," Murray said in an FDA news release.

"The good news is that when you cure hepatitis C, you also lower its risks, though you don't completely erase the years of damage to your [liver](#)," he added.

In the past, being diagnosed with hepatitis C meant months of painful

drug injections with interferon-based injections.

"Interferon-based injections often make patients feel ill and give them flulike symptoms,

Murray said. The drug also cures only about half of those with hepatitis C, according to the FDA.

Today, patients with the condition have more and better options. "Now, patients can treat their hepatitis C with only pills—drug combinations that are faster and have a higher cure rate," Murray said.

Newer hepatitis C medications have doubled the hepatitis C cure rates. The new treatments can reach between a 90 to 100 percent cure rate within about 12 weeks. Not only has treatment becomes faster, but it's also easier for patients to take an oral medication than receive injections, the FDA said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises Americans born between 1945 and 1965, or have other risk factors such as receiving kidney dialysis or using [drug](#) needles, to get a blood test to screen for hepatitis C.

"When it comes to [hepatitis](#) C, the outlook for the future is better, but the past is catching up with us—especially if you are a baby boomer," Murray said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information on [hepatitis C](#).

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