Wellness Guide

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HEPATITIS C PREVENTION & CARE



WELCOME!



This guide has basic information about Hepatitis C (HCV) prevention and treatment for individuals receiving substance use treatment. It's split into individual sections that you can use as best suits your needs.

Continue reading to learn how this information can contribute to your overall wellness planning!

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Section 1:

Understanding Hepatitis C

WHY TALK ABOUT HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a virus that causes inflammation of the liver, which can lead to serious liver damage over time. The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is primarily spread through blood-to-blood contact.

An estimated 2.7 million people in the US have HCV, but **more** than half don't know their status.

Some may be unaware of how HCV is transmitted and not know that they are at risk. Others experience no symptoms and wouldn't think to get tested. But, it is recommended that all adults be screened for HCV₁.

Hepatitis C can be cured, and everyone who has HCV should be treated₂. **Today, nearly 100% of people who take HCV medication as prescribed are cured**, and for most people treatment means taking 1-3 pills per day for 8-12 weeks with few or no side effects.

IN THIS GUIDE: ☐ Basic information about HCV ☐ Resources for prevention, testing and care ☐ What to expect from HCV medical care A glossary of terms is included on page 30-31!

ABOUT HEPATITIS C

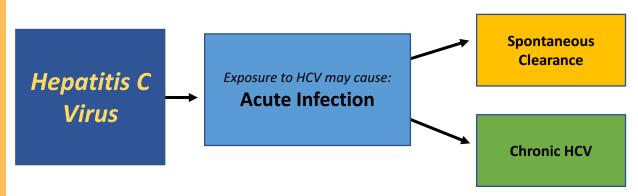
Viral hepatitis is a contagious virus that causes liver inflammation (swelling) and damage such as scarring of the liver (fibrosis).

Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is one type of viral hepatitis. Over time, HCV can decrease liver function, and lead to serious illness.

The liver is the largest organ in the body. Its main jobs are to filter and detoxify the body and to store vitamins and minerals.

For some people, hepatitis C is a short-term illness (known as an acute infection) that the body can clear on its own (spontaneous clearance). But, for more than half of people who acquire HCV, it becomes a long-term, chronic infection.

Many people with HCV have no symptoms or have very mild symptoms.



The good news is: hepatitis C can be cured!

Section 2:

HCV Transmission and Prevention

HCV TRANSMISSION

INJECTION DRUG USE

This includes needles and equipment used to prepare drugs, including cookers, cotton, water, straws and pipes. HCV can stay infectious – and can be transmitted - in blood outside of the body for days or even weeks. Use clean needles AND works every time!

CHILDBIRTH & PREGNANCY



All pregnant people should be tested at every pregnancy. If a parent is HCV positive, linking to medical care is critical. HCV treatment usually isn't offered during pregnancy, but appropriate medical care can help protect both parent and baby.

SEXUAL TRANSMISSION



Though it's less common, HCV can be transmitted through unprotected sex. Men who have sex with men who are living with HIV are the most vulnerable. Use safer sex practices whenever possible to reduce HCV transmission.

UNSTERILE TATTOOS OR PIERCINGS



Because HCV stays infectious in blood outside of the body, any unsterilized equipment, ink, water or other tools used in tattooing could transmit HCV. Make sure that your tattoo artist or piercer uses sterile equipment and water.

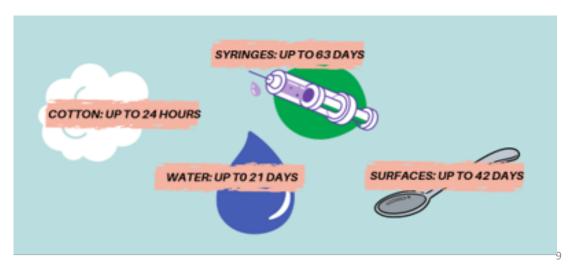
SUBSTANCE USE & HCV VULNERABILITY

- Currently, injection drug use is the most common mode of HCV transmission.
- There are about 2 million people who have HCV in the US, and at least half of those people don't know their status.
- More than 70% of people who inject drugs have had prior exposure to HCV.
- In Pennsylvania, there are an estimated 93,900 people with HCV. 2

Why do people with substance use disorder have increased vulnerability to acquiring HCV?

Using injection drugs can **lead to HCV transmission** if you share needles, syringes, or other drug preparation equipment. About 1 in 3 people who inject drugs acquire HCV in their first year of injecting.

HCV can stay infectious outside of the body for days, or even weeks, and can be transmitted during that time. Often, HCV is transmitted through syringes, cookers, cotton, water, pipes and straws. Using clean drug preparation equipment is key!



HARM REDUCTION FOR HCV PREVENTION

Using sterile needles or syringes and injection equipment can greatly reduce your risk of acquiring HCV. Getting new syringes ensures that they are sterile.

If getting new needles or syringes isn't an option for you, then there are ways you can sterilize the syringes that you have.



WHERE TO GET STERILE SYRINGES OR NEEDLES

- Local syringe service programs (SSPs)
 - SSPs provide sterile syringes and injection equipment.
 - Find an SSP here: https://nasen.org/
- Pharmacies (some sell new needles or syringes)
- Doctors (some can write prescriptions for new needles or syringes)

Even needles or syringes that haven't been used for a while should be sterilized – viruses can still be infectious!

STERILIZATION TIPS

- If new, sterile needles or syringes aren't available, cleaning should follow 3 steps:
 - 1. Rinse needle or syringe out with clean water. *(repeat until water is clear)*
 - 2. Disinfect needle or syringe with pure bleach.
 - 3. Rinse needle or syringe out again with clean water.
- Only sterile needles or syringes should ever draw mixing water



https://harmreduction.org/resource-center/harm-reduction-near-you/

The National Harm Reduction Coalition has links that can help you find harm reduction resources and tools that you need to keep yourself and your community safe & healthy.

Section 3:

HCV Testing

HCV TESTING

It takes two tests to confirm a hepatitis C diagnosis.

The first test looks for *antibodies*, and the second test looks for the presence of hepatitis C *virus* or *RNA* in the blood.

Anyone who has ever had an HCV infection – even if the body spontaneously cleared it or someone was cured – will have antibodies for hepatitis C.

ANTI-HCV ANTIBODY

A positive or reactive antibody test means that a person was exposed to the hepatitis C virus. An exposure doesn't always lead to a long-term infection.

An HCV antibody test can be done either with a rapid finger stick test or through a blood draw.

HCV RNA

A positive or reactive RNA test result means that there is virus in the blood stream, which means that there is an active HCV infection.

Sometimes these tests are referred to as "confirmatory" or "PCR" tests. This test requires a blood draw and lab test.

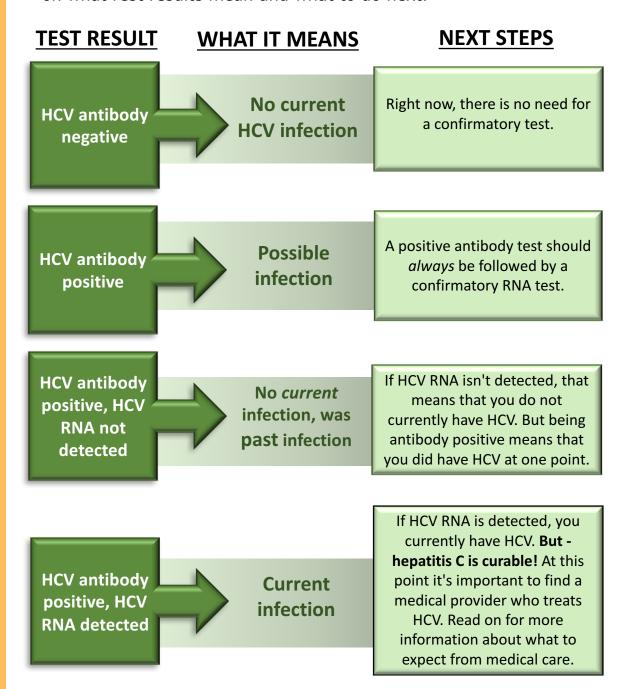
What's an antibody?

Antibodies are a protein made by the immune system in response to a bacteria, disease or virus – such as HCV.

- ✓ HCV antibodies are *not* protective against future HCV infection.
- HCV antibodies stay in the body for life, so a positive antibody test does not confirm HCV infection

UNDERSTANDING YOUR RESULTS

Because it takes **2 tests** to diagnose HCV, understanding the results and next steps can be confusing. Below is more information on what rest results mean and what to do next.



RESOURCES FOR HCV TESTING

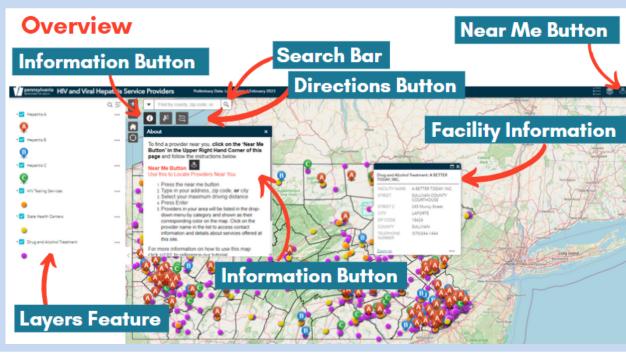
There are many places in PA that offer HCV testing. Visit the link below or scan the QR code to find testing near you.





bit.ly/DOHmap

Below is a brief overview of how to use the online map of HCV resources.



The map can be viewed on a computer or mobile device. If you don't have access to either, don't hesitate to ask your medical provider for help!□



Section 4:

HCV Treatment

WHAT TO EXPECT

It can sometimes take a few weeks before someone is able to take their first dose of HCV medication. Here's what to expect:

STEPS IN HEPATITIS C TREATMENT

Medical Visit: □

The first step in HCV treatment is an **appointment with a medical provider** who can treat HCV. The provider will take information about your medical history, do a physical, and send you for bloodwork.

Blood Work & Disease Staging: □

Pretreatment **blood work** helps a medical provider make decisions about what type of treatment is best for you. These include labs to assess your liver health, an HIV test, hepatitis A & B tests and more. \Box

Treatment Initiation:

Almost 100% of people who take medication for HCV as prescribed are cured. For most people, treatment means taking from 1-3 pills per day by mouth for 8-12 weeks. Side effects are uncommon and for most people they are mild.

<u>Cure:</u>□

Cure is defined as having no copies of HCV in your blood. The test used is called a viral load or RNA test. To confirm that you have cured, a provider will run a viral load test 12 weeks after your last pill. If that test shows no virus in your blood (also known as an undetectable viral load) you've achieved cure. This test result is called a sustained virologic response (SVR).

BLOOD WORK

A medical provider will do blood work to learn more about the overall health of the person and the impact HCV has had on their body.

These include lab tests to measure liver damage and learn the type of HCV someone has. Additionally, a medical provider will order an HIV test, tests for hepatitis A & B, kidney function and more.

Each provider may do blood work at different times during treatment. In addition to the labs taken before treatment, some may test to see how much virus is in the blood – known as a "viral load" during treatment and right after someone completes finishes treatment.

Important Lab Tests

Quantitative/PCR/Viral load

Measures how much virus is in the blood

Genotype

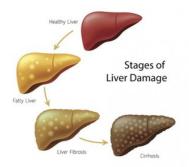
There are different types of HCV. Most HCV medicines can be used for any type of HCV, so the genotype doesn't usually impact medication options.

Fibrosure

This is a blood test that measures damage to the liver.

LIVER ASSESSMENT

Before treatment, a medical provider will measure how sick the liver is by looking at the amount of scarring. A test called a **METAVIR or F score** tells us if someone has fibrosis or cirrhosis.



Fibrosis: light scarring of the liver **Cirrhosis**: heavy scarring of the liver

A METAVIR score measures how sick the liver is on a scale from 0-4. The least damage is 0, and the most damage is 4.

Over time, viral hepatitis leads to liver scarring, which means that the liver can't do its job to filter and detoxify the blood.

METAVIR score:

F0-F4

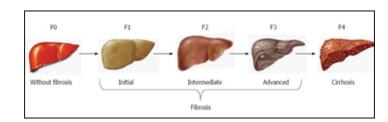
FO: No fibrosis

F1: Mild fibrosis

F2: Moderate fibrosis

F3: Severe fibrosis

F4: Cirrhosis



A METAVIR score can be calculated with either of the following tests:

- FibroSure blood test
- FibroScan or other imaging (like an ultrasound)

In the past a <u>liver biopsy</u> was used to measure liver health. The good news is that we don't use that invasive test anymore!

APPOINTMENT PREPARATION

Here are some things to consider as you get ready for your appointment.



Transportation

If you can't drive, get a ride or take public transportation to your appointment, there may be resources available to help. Talk to your counselor or ask the front desk at the medical providers office if they have or know about resources.



211 is a resource that can help - Text your zip code to 898-211 or dial 211 to get help from a resource navigator

□ Is there someone you can take with you?

Many find that a having a support person with them can reduce anxiety.

□ Consider writing notes

It's hard to keep track of a lot of new information – especially when it's complicated medical info! Taking notes will help you keep track of details about your health and medical care.

□ There are no bad questions!

Medical and health information can sometimes be difficult to understand. Don't be afraid to ask the medical provider to repeat or explain something. It's your health and your medical care, and you deserve to understand what's going on!

Patient portals

Many medical providers have patient portals, which are websites that allow patients to see their personal health information, such as lab results. If this technology isn't familiar to you, ask if there is assistance to learn about using the portal. If you don't have reliable computer, smart phone or internet access, talk to the medical provider about the best way to communicate.

AT THE APPOINTMENT

Medical History

Most medical providers will want some information about your medical history. This will help make sure that the medical care they provide – including your hepatitis C treatment – will be the best and safest option for your body. It can be hard to remember some of these details, so take a moment to write them down beforehand!

Current medications
Other medical conditions or diagnoses (diabetes, asthma)
If you've been treated for hepatitis C before
Allergies
Any documentation or medical records you have
Insurance information
Contact information for other medical providers
Family history of medical conditions

The Medical Office

If possible, it can be helpful to show up **a few minutes early** to your appointment. This can give you some time to complete any paperwork provided by the front desk and to trouble shoot any problems you may have finding the place or signing in.

Find out what the policies are for rescheduling or missing appointments.

If you care for young children and cannot find childcare, ask the medical provider's office if they allow children to accompany caretakers to medical appointments.

YOUR MEDICAL CARE

Tests & Evaluation

It can be helpful to have some understanding of what is happening with your hepatitis C and overall health. While you don't need to memorize or understand *every* detail, here are some questions you may want to ask.

- What is my F score?
 More info on how to understand liver damage is on page 12
- What do my labs mean?
 More info on how to understand lab results is on page 11
- □ Do I need imaging or other testing in addition to blood work?

Treatment

Starting a new medical treatment can be overwhelming! Here are some questions that might help you understand what to expect from treatment.

- What are my treatment options?
- Side effects
 - What are common side effects?
 - What can I do to manage side effects? (Over the counter medicine, eating before taking meds, etc)
- □ Are there any drug/drug interactions I should know about?
- ☐ What happens if I miss a dose?
- ☐ How often will I need to see the medical provider or get blood work done?
- ☐ Is there a particular pharmacy that I need to use?



RESOURCES FOR HCV TREATMENT

Both commercial/private medical insurance and state Medicaid/Medicare will cover medical visits, labs and prescriptions for HCV treatment.

If you need help applying for insurance, check out the resources below.

PA 211 is a wealth of resources for housing, utilities, food, employment and expenses, health, and mental health.

To get help from a resource navigator, text your zip code to 898-211 or dial 211.

Resource	Contact Info	Info
Marketplace	www.healthcare.gov 800-318-2596	Open Enrollment Nov. 1 through Dec. 15, unless qualify for Special Enrollment Period (SEP). More details online.
Navigator Programs	https://www.pa211.org/get- help/health/navigator- programs/	
PA Health & Dental Marketplace	https://pennie.com/	Link to additional financial assistance from the American Rescue Plan to lower your monthly payment and/or out-of-pocket expenses.
State and local Health Insurance Information & Counseling	https://www.pa211.org/get-help/health/state-local-health-insurance-information-counseling/	Can search by county, zip & city. Population specific resources (aging, vets, etc) included.

Section 5:

Medication Adherence

TAKING YOUR MEDICATION

What is "Adherence" and why is it important?

- ✓ Adherence means to stick to something.
- ✓ In order for meds to work, there needs to be **enough medication** in the body for a **long enough time** to do their job, which is to **STOP HCV FROM REPLICATING**.
- ✓ This is why it is so important to take every day, at the same time, and to finish all the medicine as prescribed.

Setting yourself up for success!

It can be helpful to do some problem solving *before* issues with adherence come up. Some questions to ask yourself:

- What are my concerns about adherence?
- What might make adherence hard for me?
- Who can I talk to about my concerns?
- Where can I get more information?
- ☐ Who can help me find solutions to challenges I face?

What might make adherence difficult?

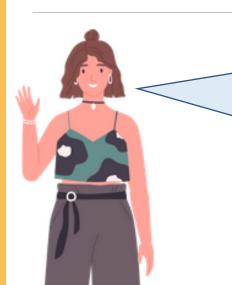
- · Work, childcare, being busy
- Being tired of taking meds
- Side effects
- Feeling better maybe I don't need these meds anymore?
- Disclosure
- Unstable housing
- Mental health challenges
- Arrest or incarceration

TIPS & TRICKS FOR ADHERENCE

Tools for remembering your meds

- □ Alarm clock
- ☐ Alerts, reminders or alarms in your phone
- ☐ Take meds at the same time as something you do every day when you brush your teeth, get ready for bed, make coffee
- □ Have a friend help remind you
- ☐ Keep a pill card in your pocket to keep track of each pill taken
- ☐ Put a calendar up and mark each day you take your meds
- □ Pill boxes
 - ☐ Tip! Some pillboxes can be attached to a lanyard so you can keep your meds close to you if you're nervous about theft or sharing your private health information.

What tools can YOU think of that might help you keep on track with taking your medication?



If you miss a dose - Don't beat yourself up! We all forget to do things sometimes.

Don't double up - take the next dose as usual.

If you have missed several doses in a row, it's a good idea to check in with your medical provider.

AFTER TREATMENT

Confirming Cure: Sustained Virologic Response (SVR12)

Cure is defined by a sustained virologic response (SVR), which means that there are no copies of HCV in your blood. Your medical provider will run a viral load (also called an RNA test and/or PCR test) 12 weeks after you complete treatment. If that test shows no copies of HCV in your blood, that means you're cured!

What if the treatment isn't successful?

Sometimes hepatitis C treatment doesn't successfully cure on the first try. There are a few reasons that treatment may not work, including your genetics or missing some pills during treatment. The most important things know are:

- · You can and should be treated again
- There are no limits on how many times you can be treated
- There is no evidence to suggest that if treatment doesn't work the first time it won't work in the future.
- Insurance will cover re-treatment.



What if I contract hepatitis C again?

HCV antibodies don't prevent future infections, so reinfection does happen. The most important thing is to connect back with a medical provider to be treated again. It's also a great time to think about prevention and harm reduction tools that you can use to prevent future HCV infection.

LIVER HEALTH

Protect Your Liver

- While we don't have a vaccine for hepatitis C, there are vaccines for other types of viral hepatitis. Be sure that you are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B. Avoiding infection with hepatitis A and B will prevent additional damage to your liver.
- Ask your medical provider about medications that can damage the liver.
- Avoid drinking alcohol.

Protect Your Cure

Hepatitis C reinfection can happen. Be sure to practice harm reduction and avoid blood to blood contact. Some common prevention methods include:

- ☐ Using barriers (condoms, dental dams) during sex
- Using sterile drug preparation equipment



Liver Cancer Screenings:

- ☐ Some people with hepatitis C are at risk for developing liver cancer, called hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).
- ☐ Your medical provider may want to monitor you over time so that if cancer develops it can be caught early and treated.
- ☐ For many, long term monitoring involves an ultrasound or other imaging every six months, but your medical provider will discuss the recommendations that work best for your individual situation.

RESOURCES FOR HCV TREATMENT

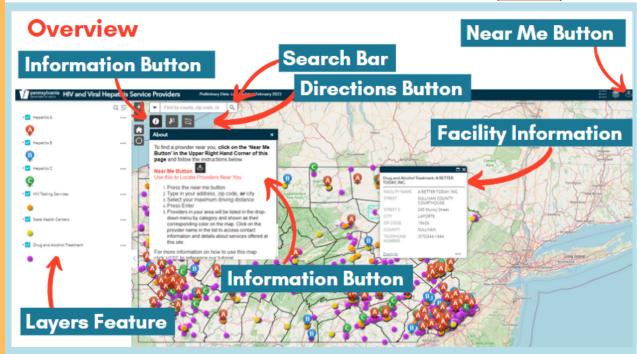


There are many places in PA that offer HCV treatment. Visit the link below or scan the QR code to find treatment near you.

bit.ly/DOHmap

Below is a brief overview of how to use the online map of HCV resources.







The map can be viewed on a computer or mobile device. If you don't have access to either, don't hesitate to ask your medical provider for help!□

Section 6: Appendix

GLOSSARY

Acute Infection: a new infection

Antibody test: This test tells us if someone has *ever* had a hepatitis C infection.

Antibody positive: Antibodies to hepatitis C are present in the blood, which means that someone has had hepatitis C. It does *not* confirm a hepatitis C diagnosis.

Antibody negative: Antibodies to hepatitis C are not present in the blood. This means that someone has never had hepatitis C.

Confirmatory Test: A test that looks for hepatitis C virus.

Chronic Infection: A long lasting infection

Cirrhosis: Severe liver scarring.

Fibrosure: A blood test that measures liver damage.

Fibroscan: An imaging test that measures liver damage, similar to an ultrasound.

F score: The stage of liver damage from mild (0) to severe (4). F scores can be F0, F1, F2, F3 or F4.

Fibrosis: Liver scarring.

Genotype: Different types of hepatitis C

HCV: Hepatitis C Virus

Hepatitis: the medical term for liver inflammation

Hepatacellular Carcinoma (HCC): Liver cancer.

Inflammation: A normal part of a body's response to an infection or injury. When it lasts too long it can damage the body's tissue.

GLOSSARY

METAVIR score: A measure of liver damage from mild (0) to severe (4).

Pangenotypic: Refers to medicine that can treat every genotype of hepatitis C.

PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test: A test that looks for hepatitis C virus.

RNA positive: Hepatitis C virus is present in the blood. This means that someone has a hepatitis C infection.

RNA neg Hepatitis C virus is NOT present in the blood. This means that someone does NOT have a hepatitis C infection.

RNA test: A test to look for the presence of hepatitis C virus in the blood.

RNA Detected: Hepatitis C virus is present in the blood. This means that someone has a hepatitis C infection.

Reactive: A positive test result.

Reinfection: Becoming infected with hepatitis C virus after curing.

Spontaneous Clearance: When the body cures or clears the hepatitis C virus without medicine.

SVR (sustained virologic response): Hepatitis C is not detected in the blood 12 weeks or more after completing hepatitis C treatment. This is how we define cure.

Viral Load: The amount of hepatitis C virus in the blood

Preparing for a Medical Visit Patient Worksheet

NA	ME:		
DA	TE OF BIRTH:		
Cu 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	rrent medications:		
Other medical conditions or diagnoses (diabetes, asthma, HIV, etc)			
AII	Allergies:		
Fai	mily history of medical conditions or diagnoses:		
На	ve you been treated for hepatitis C before? Y N If yes, when: What medicine: Did you cure? Y N		
	ecklist of items & information to bring to your first medical pointment:		
	Documents such as lab work, medical records		
	Insurance information		
	☐ Contact information for other medical providers		
	List of questions		

Questions for my Medical Provider Patient Worksheet: Tests & Evaluation

Tests & Evaluation

	What is my F score? More info on how to understand liver damage is on page 12
-	What do my labs mean? More info on how to understand lab results is on page 11
-	Do I need imaging or other testing in addition to blood work? What are those tests?

Questions for my Medical Provider Patient Worksheet: Treatment

Treatment

	What are my treatment options?
.	Side effects What are common side effects?
,	• What can I do to manage side effects? (Over the counter medicine, eating before taking meds, etc)
	Are there any drug/drug interactions I should know about?
	What happens if I miss a dose?
	How often will I need to see the medical provider or get blood work done?
	Is there a particular pharmacy that I need to use?
	What kind of follow up or ongoing medical care will I need?

Keeping Track of Treatment

Patient Worksheet (page 1 of 7)

Medication Information			
Medication Name:			
Directions: (how many pills per day, take with food, etc)			
Refills			
How many refills:			
Refill due date I: Directions for refilling:			
Refill due date 2: Directions for refilling:			
Medication Schedule			
First dose date: Last dose date:			
Due for SVR12 test:			

Questions, Concerns, Notes:

Keeping Track of Treatment Patient Worksheet (page 2 of 7)

WEEK ONE		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

WEEKTWO		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Keeping Track of Treatment Patient Worksheet (page 3 of 7)

WEEKTHREE		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

WEEK FOUR		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Keeping Track of Treatment Patient Worksheet (page 4 of 7)

WEEK FIVE		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

WEEK SIX		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Keeping Track of Treatment Patient Worksheet (page 5 of 7)

WEEK SEVEN		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

WEEK EIGHT		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Keeping Track of Treatment Patient Worksheet (page 6 of 7)

WEEK NINE		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

WEEKTEN		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Keeping Track of Treatment

Patient Worksheet (page 7 of 7)

WEEK ELEVEN		
Day	Took Meds (y/n)	Notes (side effects, questions)
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Day Took Meds (y/n) Notes (side effects, questions) Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday