Hepatitis C treatment guidelines published by the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease, the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons have stated that all people with hepatitis C are candidates for treatment. However, they state that healthcare providers, including prisons and jails, should “prioritize” patients with the greatest need for medical treatment. Unfortunately, because there are so many people with hepatitis C in prison and jail, this means treatment options are often very limited.

Here is a list of some factors that may impact if and when you can be treated for hepatitis C:

- **Liver health:** Prisons and community healthcare providers prioritize treatment for those with more advanced liver scarring. Most prison systems will require stage 3 or stage 4 liver fibrosis (scarring) before considering treatment. Liver scarring can be determined through a variety of tests including blood tests, fibroscan or a liver biopsy. Ask your doctors what the requirements are in your facility, and make sure you request to have your liver health monitored over time.

- **Prison health care providers may consider your age, your genotype, your previous treatments for hepatitis C (if any), and your other medical conditions.**

- **Your release date:** You usually must have at least as much time left on your sentence as it takes to get treatment, and sometimes longer.

- **Ability to “adhere” to treatment:** When you get treated for hepatitis C, it’s very important to take your medications on time every day, otherwise, treatment may not work. Some prisons require you to show that you are capable of taking your medicines correctly, this may require a mental health or chemical dependency evaluation.

- **Jail vs. Prison:** If you are serving time in a jail rather than a prison, your treatment options may be more limited. Ask your jail nurse or doctor about getting linked-to-care for hepatitis when you are released so that you can see a doctor in the community as soon as possible.

Remember, these factors vary depending on your state and facility. Ask your doctor in your facility what the requirements for hepatitis C treatment are.
What do I do if I can’t get treated?

If you cannot be treated right away, we encourage you to find out why and to seek treatment when it becomes possible even if that is when you are released. In the meantime, there are ways to keep yourself as healthy as possible if you can’t be treated right away:

- Try to avoid alcohol and other substances.
- Maintain a healthy weight (eat well and exercise).
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B. Many prisons offer these immunizations for free.
- Monitor your liver health. See your prison or jail health care providers regularly. Ask if they offer tests to monitor your liver and how often you can be checked. This will help catch any problems early.
- Learn as much as you can about hepatitis C while you are locked up.
- Sign up for health insurance and see a doctor for your hepatitis C when you are released.
- After release, make sure your doctor in the community gets copies of your medical records from when you were incarcerated.

It is frustrating to wait to receive hepatitis C treatment, but many people wait for treatment without negative health consequences. It is important that you continue to see your prison healthcare provider often to monitor your health. If you feel you are being denied medically necessary treatment, please use proper procedures at your facility to get more information or consider filing a grievance.