

USA WEEKEND

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**Special
health
report**

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HEPATITIS C: It kills as many as HIV does

Called a “silent epidemic,” hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne virus in America, infecting about 3 million people. From 10% to 40% of infected people have no identifiable risk factors at all. A blood test is the way to diagnose it.

“The number of annual deaths from hepatitis C is about the same as HIV,” notes Adrian Di Bisceglie, chief of hepatology at Saint Louis University School of Medicine, “but you rarely hear about it, because people don’t feel sick.”

Hepatitis C is a lifelong infection that progresses slowly. Caught within the first

six months, it is 90% to 100% curable. But usually it’s discovered decades after exposure, when the liver is damaged, and treatment is challenging.

The most common risk factor for the disease is injection drug use: Having experimented even once in your life puts you at risk.

— Susan T. Lennon

My friend and freelance colleague Peggy J. Noonan had two other briefs in this spread. For my readers’ ease, I moved the first part of my column up to the top and truncated the rest.