

# HCVAction

Bringing you the latest hepatitis C news and events

April 2020

## Update on hepatitis C services during COVID-19 response

The pressures that health services are under from COVID-19 varies significantly across the country and this has had a variable impact on the ability of hospitals to deliver treatment for hepatitis C.

Whilst all services will be triaging and treating patients on a case-by-case basis according to individual clinical judgements, we hope the following information gives a useful guide of activity in different areas, particularly for drug treatment services who may have clients who wish to be referred to treatment. Given the additional risk people with hepatitis C are likely to be at from COVID-19 due to other underlying health conditions, stopping new treatments may be in the best interest of these patients to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 infection.

As the situation is still changing rapidly, the best and most reliable source of information will be your own services and contacts. Unless otherwise stated all outreach testing and post-treatment testing for SVR (sustained virologic response) has stopped.

[The Hepatitis C Trust Helpline and Information Service](#) remains open to give advice and support to professionals as well as patients.

## England

- **North East and Cumbria ODN** - New treatment starts stopped, patients given medication to complete course at end of March.
- **Cheshire & Merseyside ODN** - New treatment starts stopped, all patients given medication to complete.
- **West Yorkshire ODN** - Some new treatment starts, all patients given medication to complete.
- **South Yorkshire ODN** - Some new treatment starts, all patients given medication to complete.
- **Humberside and North Yorkshire ODN** - Some new treatment starts, all patients given medication to complete.

- **Greater Manchester ODN** - Beginning to use telephone appointments to start new patients on treatment, with patients being given full course to complete.
- **Lancashire and South Cumbria ODN** - Some hospitals still able to start treatment, patients delivered complete medication course to complete.
- **Leicester ODN** - Hospital taking referrals for MDT for treatment when lockdown eased. All patients given medication to complete.
- **Birmingham ODN** - Some treatment starts using pangenotypic medication. All patients given medication to complete.
- **Nottingham ODN** - Some new patients starting on treatment through telephone assessment. Full course of medication being delivered.
- **Eastern Hepatitis Network** - Starting patients on treatment via phone consultation and sending medication via courier.
- **West London ODN** - Some treatment starts, making use of fact some homeless patients are now in hotel accommodation. All patients given full treatment.
- **North Central London** - No new patients started on treatment, existing patients delivered complete medication to complete.
- **Barts ODN** - Case-by-case judgement.
- **South Thames Hepatitis Network (STHepNet) Kings & St George's** - Some patients being started or restarted on treatment. Patients delivered complete medication course.
- **Surrey Hepatitis Services** - Some new patients started on treatment. Plans to test for SVR.
- **Thames Valley ODN** - New treatment starts stopped, patients delivered medication course to complete.
- **Sussex Hepatology Network** - Some patients being started or restarted on treatment. Patients delivered complete medication course to complete. Nurses supporting patients through telephone appointments.
- **Wessex ODN** - New treatment starts stopped. Patients delivered complete medication course.
- **Bristol and Severn Hep C ODN** - New treatment starts stopped. Patients delivered complete medication course.
- **South West Peninsula Hepatitis C ODN** - Some new treatment starts. Some outreach work. Patients delivered complete medication course.
- **Kent via Kings ODN** - Some patients being started or restarted on treatment. Patients delivered complete medication course.

## Scotland

Treatment targets for 2020/2021 will not be enforced but the aim of elimination by 2024 remains. Examples of the approach taken in two health boards are below.

### NHS Forth Valley

- Not planning to start new patients on treatment but patients on treatment to be provided with medication to complete their course.

### NHS Lothian

- Patients on treatment or about to start supported to complete.
- Nurses will triage referrals and prioritise those with advanced liver disease.
- Continue to refer hepatitis C positives to treatment centres as usual.

# Wales

## Swansea

No new patients starting on treatment. All existing patients have been allocated full course of medication. No testing for SVR.



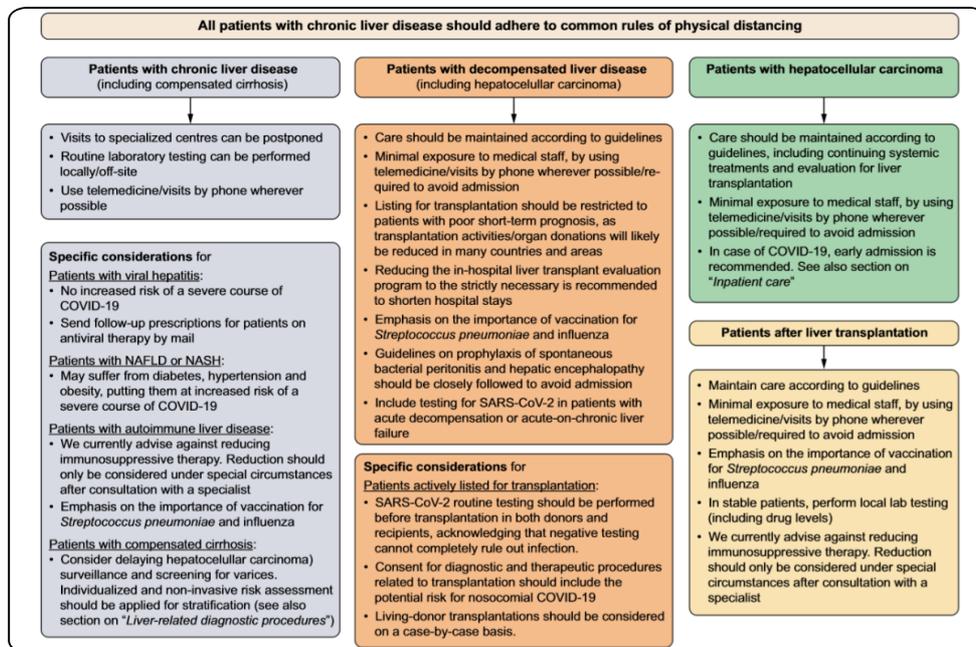
## Resources and guidance for substance misuse services

- [The Hepatitis C Trust](#) has published two leaflets on advice for people to keep themselves safe from COVID-19. The first contains advice for the general public ([available to print here](#)), the second focuses on harm reduction for people who use drugs ([available to print here](#)).
- The [Scottish Drugs Forum](#) has launched an [interactive tool](#) to help people find their local needle exchange during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- [Humankind](#) has published harm reduction [advice](#) for people who use drugs.
- [Adfam](#) has developed a leaflet with [10 tips](#) for families to stay healthy and well whilst staying at home.
- The [NHS Substance Misuse Provider Alliance](#) published [advice](#) about establishing a programme to deliver opioid substitution therapy to clients. This is based on a [programme in Dorset](#) using the local council's Highways team as couriers.

More resources can be found on the [Collective Voice](#) website [here](#).

Relevant guidance from national governments for substance misuse services can be found here for [England](#), [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

BBC News reported on work in Edinburgh to support people who use drugs and homeless people. You can watch the clip [here](#).



## EASL recommendations for the care of patients with chronic liver disease

The [European Association for the Study of the Liver](#) published recommendations for clinicians for the care of chronic liver disease, including viral hepatitis and decompensated liver disease.

Key points include:

- Patients with viral hepatitis have no increased risk of a severe course of COVID-19
- For patients with decompensated liver disease, flu vaccination is advised as well as taking steps to minimise contact with medical staff and the length of any hospital stays.



Royal College of  
General Practitioners

## RCGP recommendations on secure environments

This advice aims to provide practical answers for clinicians working in secure environments. It does not supersede advice from [Public Health England \(PHE\)](#), [NHS England/NHS Improvement](#) or [HMPPS](#) or local operational guidance.

The section on blood-borne viruses advises that:

- Ongoing BBV testing, referral and treatment for hepatitis C should continue whilst there is capacity to do so unless advice to the contrary is given by PHE, NHSE or liver specialists.
- Harm reduction measures should be advised in patients who have a history of high risk behaviour for infection.
- Ensure all residents are aware of the dangers of drug use and sharing of equipment and containers - health messages through in-cell TV, radio, posters - in partnership with substance misuse team.

The full guidance can be viewed [here](#).

Guidance published by the [Royal College of Nursing](#) echoes these recommendations and can be read [here](#).

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## News and reports

\* Early data from the [COVID-Hep](#) registry was published suggesting high rates of mortality among people with COVID-19 and liver cirrhosis. View the full data set [here](#).

\* An article in [The Lancet](#) called for specific public health messaging for people who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic, including harm reduction advice. The article also noted that: "treatment continuity plans (e.g. permitting online visits, phone-based refills, extended prescriptions, permitting take-home doses, permitting prescriptions to be transferred between pharmacies, and providing ongoing access through outreach and delivery options) are needed for individuals living with HIV, hepatitis C virus, and substance use disorders." Read more [here](#).

\* Modelling of different HCV testing and treatment strategies in Montréal, Canada, published in the [International Journal of Drug Policy](#) found that prison-based programmes had the greatest impact in reducing the number of new infections. The modelling was based on local provincial prisons which are similar to UK remand prisons with frequent incarcerations and short sentences. Additionally, "when implemented concomitantly with community-based treatment scale-up, prison-based interventions had synergistic effects, averting a higher fraction of new first chronic infections." Read more [here](#).

\* [Harm Reduction International](#) has compiled evidence showing the cost-effectiveness of harm reduction measures. It includes evidence from the UK showing how needle and syringe provision and opioid substitution therapy can be cost-effective and cost-saving. In Slovakia, a study found that every euro invested in harm reduction generated benefits worth three euros, and every HCV infection averted would save €106,000 in treatment and quality-of-life costs over 25 years. Read more [here](#).

\* The number of laboratory reports of hepatitis C reported by [Public Health England](#) from October to December 2019 from England and Wales has been published, including the breakdown by ODN. There were 3,339 reports in this period, an increase of 13% on the same period last year. The addition is due to the addition of previously missing data. Read the report [here](#).

\* The [World Hepatitis Alliance](#) published its annual impact report, summarising key achievements in raising the importance of hepatitis elimination around the world. Read the full report [here](#).

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## Share good practice

If you would like your service to be featured as a good practice case study on the HCV Action website, have any news to share with colleagues, or would be interested in being an [HCV Action Ambassador](#), please send an email to [hcvaction@hepctrust.org.uk](mailto:hcvaction@hepctrust.org.uk).



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*HCV Action is co-funded by AbbVie, Gilead, and MSD.  
The Hepatitis C Trust provides secretariat support to HCV Action.*

Please encourage colleagues to join HCV Action for free hepatitis C related updates and tools by emailing their full contact details to [hcvaction@hepctrust.org.uk](mailto:hcvaction@hepctrust.org.uk).

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