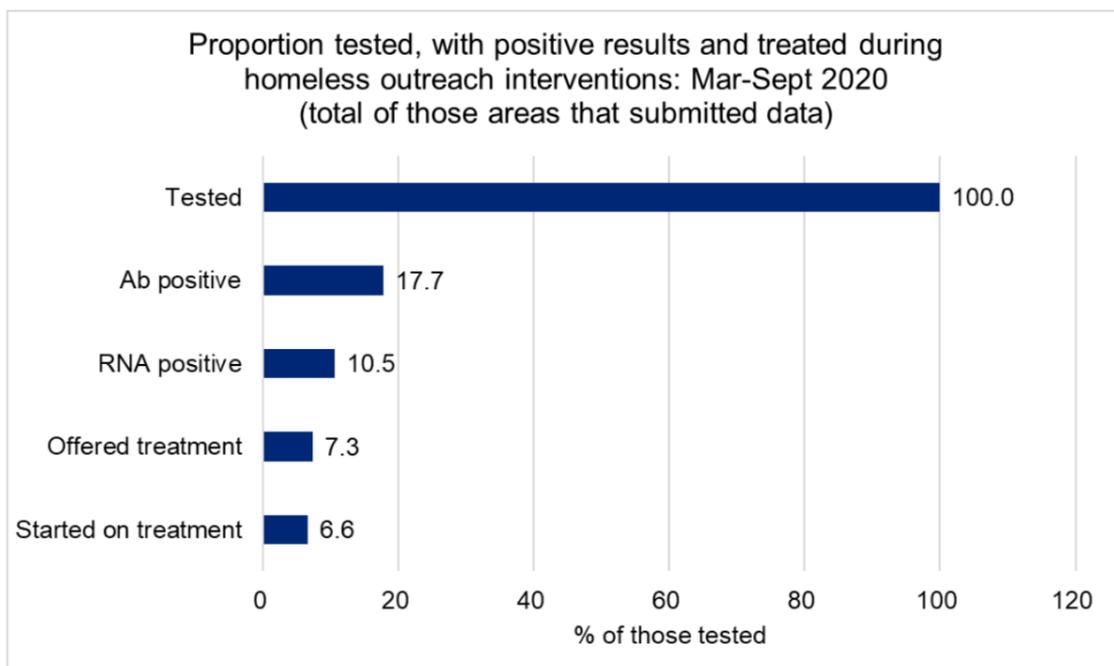


HCVAction

Bringing you the latest hepatitis C news and events

January 2021

Testing and treating housed homeless people in the pandemic had 'substantial impact', says Public Health England report



[Public Health England](#) has published an evaluation of efforts to test and treat homeless people housed under the 'Everyone In' policy for hepatitis C during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their evaluation used data and interviews with staff from 11 areas in England, all outside of London.

Across the 11 areas, testing was carried out in 63 settings. Within these settings, 1,263 clients were tested, with 133 (10.5%) found to have a current infection (HCV RNA positive). By the time data was submitted, 92 (69.2% of those testing RNA positive) had been offered treatment and 83 (90.2% of those offered) had started treatment.

The report concludes that "providers are strongly encouraged to develop and enhance these types of interventions". Recommendations for the future included: build strong partnerships; use incentives, but monitor their

effectiveness; adopt a flexible approach to the practical arrangements for testing and ideally use oral swabs, DBS or rapid point of care testing; find ways to initiate treatment outside of a clinical setting and adopt a whole health approach.

The providers found that promotional messaging and materials should include:

- Practical information, such as dates and times of testing.
- Information on the range of HCV risk factors - to reduce stigma by making it clear that HCV is not just relevant to people who inject drugs.
- Explanation of the type of testing that will take place as engagement tends to be better if clients know that blood does not need to be taken.

Read the full report [here](#).

Last month, the [London Joint Working Group on Substance Use and Hepatitis C](#) published a report on interventions in London. Read more on this [here](#).

'Modest' drop in proportion of people who inject drugs in UK with chronic hepatitis C infection as of 2019



Protecting and improving the nation's health

Shooting Up: infections among people who inject drugs in the UK, 2019

An update, December 2020



[Public Health England](#) has published its annual 'Shooting Up' report. This report looks at infections which disproportionately affect people who inject drugs, including HCV, HBV, HIV and bacterial infections.

The [UAM \(Unlinked Anonymous Monitoring\)](#) survey of people who inject drugs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland found that in 2019, 23% had a chronic

(current) HCV infection, down from 29% in 2016.

In Scotland, [NESI \(Needle Exchange Surveillance Initiative\)](#) survey data indicates there was reduction in prevalence of chronic HCV infection from 39% to 19% between 2015-16 and 2019-20.

However, incidence of new infections is still believed to have remained relatively stable across the UK in recent years.

Data from an enhanced UAM survey launched in June 2020 gives some preliminary information about the impact of COVID-19 on people's behaviours and access to services. Thirty-five per cent of survey participants reported that in 2020 drug and alcohol services were more difficult to access than in the year before, with 19% reporting difficulties accessing HIV and/or hepatitis testing. Twenty-six per cent reported difficulties in accessing equipment for safely using or injecting drugs and 22% reported difficulties in accessing substitute drug treatment. A survey of service staff found that blood-borne virus testing had been stopped or temporarily paused in 45% of centres.

Read the full report [here](#).

Northern Ireland hepatitis C elimination plan published



Northern Ireland Hepatitis C Elimination Plan

The Northern Ireland [Department of Health](#) and [Public Health Agency](#) this month published an action plan which sets out the approach to eliminating hepatitis C in Northern Ireland by 2025, five years ahead of the World Health Organization 2030 target.

The plan notes that hepatitis C infection is still heavily stigmatised and includes

pledges to optimise harm reduction and prevention services and utilise peer support in elimination efforts.

Commenting on the publication of the plan, Health Minister Robin Swann said: "The last year has been a stark reminder of the devastating impact of infectious diseases on individuals and society. I am committed to making hepatitis C increasingly a disease of the past."

You can read the plan [here](#). An article in the Belfast Telegraph covered the announcement [here](#).

News and reports

* People diagnosed with HCV-related liver cancer who have been successfully treated for the virus previously have better chances of survival compared to those who were viraemic at diagnosis, according to research published in the [Journal of Viral Hepatitis](#). Read more [here](#).

* An article in [The Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatology](#) estimates global and national prevalence of hepatitis C among women of childbearing age and argues this data can inform strategies to reduce vertical (parent to child) transmission and overall disease burden. It estimates that 22,100 (12,000–27,700) women between 15-49 have hepatitis C in the UK. Read more [here](#).

* An [article](#) in [Aidsmap](#) highlights new research on eliminating hepatitis C in people with HIV in Scotland, which finds that healthcare providers will need to reach people not on HIV treatment and step up testing for hepatitis C in people who inject drugs. Read more [here](#).

* The [World Hepatitis Alliance](#) has welcomed the development of a new global health sector strategy for viral hepatitis elimination, as presented at the World Health Organization's Executive Board. The alliance has called this "a vital tool for holding countries accountable to their commitment to reach elimination." Read the World Hepatitis Alliance statement [here](#).

* Commentary published in [The Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatology](#) notes that most countries will miss the World Health Organization's targets to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030 "because they are not investing and engaging fully in elimination, despite hepatitis C elimination being highly cost-effective and cost-saving." It notes this situation is likely to get worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Read more [here](#).

* Mark Gillyon-Powell, Head of Programme, HCV Elimination, [NHS England](#) wrote for the think tank [Reform](#) about the hepatitis C elimination deal. Read the full article in Reform's 'A New Deal For Prevention' report [here](#).

* The [Home Office](#) and [Department of Health and Social Care](#) have [committed](#) £148m of new investment to reduce drug-related crime and health harms in England. Of the total, £80m will be going to drug services and to initiatives to increase the quality of care for people in and leaving prison, with the rest intended for various law enforcement programmes. Following the announcement, it was [revealed](#) that Prof Dame Carol Black, who is leading the Government's independent review of drugs, recommended that the Government announce the much greater sum of £900m at the next Spending Review, to be invested over three years. Read more about the announced funding [here](#).

* In Scotland, an additional £50 million will be allocated each year out of the next five years to tackle the drug deaths emergency. £5 million will be made immediately to support services until the end of this financial year. Funding will go towards: reducing stigma and increasing the number of people in treatment for their addiction; allocating funding directly to Alcohol and Drug Partnerships, third sector and grassroots organisations to improve work in communities; and widening the distribution of naloxone. Read more [here](#).

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.



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