

HCVAction

Bringing you the latest hepatitis C news and events

March 2020

COVID-19 could disproportionately affect many people who are already in contact with hepatology services and the settings in which hepatitis C outreach occurs, including prisons, drug and alcohol services and homelessness services. We've used this month's update to collate a number of the most relevant resources to help services and practitioners of all kinds who work to support these people.

For example, the [European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction](#) has published an [update](#) on COVID-19 warning that:

- Underlying chronic medical conditions are associated with some forms of drug use and increase the risk of developing severe illnesses from COVID-19 infection.
- The risk of drug overdose may be increased among people who use drugs who are infected with COVID-19
- Sharing drug using equipment may increase the risk of infection.

For patients with chronic liver disease, the British Society of Gastroenterology has [advised](#) that patients with autoimmune hepatitis and those who had an organ transplant are at very high risk of serious illness from COVID-19 and should undertake shielding. Patients with decompensated liver cirrhosis are at increased risk of serious illness but shielding is not advised.

Guidance for drug and alcohol services

Collective Voice

[Collective Voice](#) has collected a list of useful resources for drug and alcohol services during the COVID-19 epidemic. You can find the full list of resources [here](#).

Resources listed include:

- The [Scottish Drugs Forum](#) has published a [harm reduction leaflet](#) for people who use drugs as well as guidance on [contingency planning](#) for services.
- Dr Emmert Roberts and Dr Michael Kelleher have written a [protocol](#) for the management of opioid dependence in temporary homeless hotels during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- [Release](#) has produced '[essential journey](#)' cards for people who are travelling to access prescribed medication or needle and syringe programmes.



Guidance for homelessness services

[Public Health England](#) is due to publish updated guidance on COVID-19 for hostels or day centres for people rough sleeping. It will be available [here](#) when published.

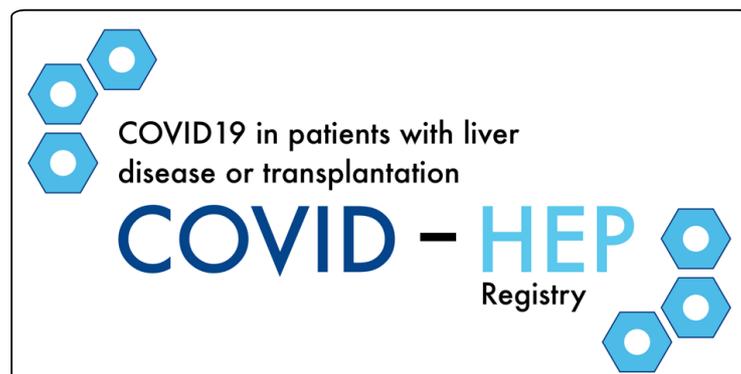
Last week the government [wrote](#) to all local authorities in England asking them

to find accommodation for all rough sleepers.

In London, [Homeless Link](#) has said that day centres, soup kitchens and day kitchens in London should close and has appealed to staff and volunteers from these services to sign up to support the London Hotels Rota. Find out more [here](#).

The charity is also hosting a weekly webinar update for homelessness services each Wednesday. You can register for the next one [here](#) and listen to the last one [here](#).

The homeless healthcare charity [Pathway](#) has published an [open letter](#) calling for a rapid COVID-19 response for vulnerable homeless patients alongside a [homeless sector plan](#) produced by Dr Al Story. This plan proposes "COVID-19 testing in all London's homeless services, separating homeless patients who test positive from those who are virus free, and setting up new emergency temporary facilities (perhaps in hotels or other currently available vacant buildings) to care separately for each group."



New register to record COVID-19 in patients with liver disease or transplantation

A new register seeks to collect data on patients with liver disease at any stage, or who have had liver transplants, who develop laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in Europe.

This includes pre-cirrhotic patients, immunosuppressed liver patients, both compensated and decompensated cirrhotic patients, and those who have already been transplanted. The register aims to capture data on patients cared for in hospital and the community.

The register is supported by [European Association for the Study of the Liver](#), the [British Association for the Study of the Liver](#), and the [British Society of Gastroenterology](#). You can find it [here](#).

News and reports

* The [London Joint Working Group on Substance Use and Hepatitis C](#) hosted an event in London City Hall to launch the new partnership to eliminate hepatitis C in London. The Mayor of London is supporting the 'Routemap to hepatitis C elimination' as part of his commitment to reducing health inequalities in the capital. The event announced five opportunity areas which have been identified as key areas of work to eliminate hepatitis C in London. These are: Reducing stigma and raising awareness; engaging people who are under-served by traditional health systems; working with GPs to find the undiagnosed; reducing pathway attrition; and aligning hepatitis C and HIV public health efforts to begin producing truly person-centred pathways. Read more about the event [here](#). Read the opportunity areas document [here](#).

* Pulse reported on the completion of the HepCATT trial, in which an algorithm was used in primary care settings to flag patients showing risk factors of hepatitis C for further testing. Around 5% of all patients were flagged with HCV risk markers; and 16% of the flagged patients were tested for HCV in HepCATT intervention practices compared to 10% in control practices – a 59% increase after adjusting for the characteristics of different practices. GPs responded positively to the scheme, noting it prompted them to test patients they would not otherwise have considered at risk. Read the article [here](#). You can read the full evaluation [here](#).

* The [BMJ](#) published a clinical update on the management of opioid dependence. It advocates a non-judgemental approach in all therapeutic contacts with opioid users to "counter stigma and pessimism about effective treatment". Read the full update [here](#).

* A new study published in the journal of [Clinical Infectious Diseases](#) by researchers from Imperial College London has found that new cases of hepatitis C amongst HIV positive men in London and Brighton have fallen by nearly 70% since 2018, coinciding with wider access to DAAs. Read more [here](#).

* The [New England Journal of Medicine](#) has published a special report on Egypt's 'massive' hepatitis C screening and testing programme. Launched in 2018, the programme aimed to screen the whole adult population of the country and has so far tested 50 million people and treated 1 million. Read more [here](#).

* New guidelines for the United States have suggested screening all adults for hepatitis C due to the rise in the number of new infections. The number of Americans living with hepatitis C is over 2 million and the most rapid rise in infections has been reported among those who are 20-29. Read more from the New York Times [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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