



News Release

Thursday 25 July 2013

London accounts for 1 in 4 hepatitis C diagnoses

London accounts for 26 per cent of all hepatitis C diagnoses reported in England in 2012 according to a new report published today (Thursday) by Public Health England (PHE) ahead of World Hepatitis Day on Sunday 28 July.

Hepatitis C diagnoses in London have almost trebled from 954 cases in 2010, to 2,844 cases in 2012, however this rise is likely to reflect reporting improvements as laboratory reporting became a statutory requirement in 2010. Laboratory confirmed new diagnoses of hepatitis C reported in England have risen by more than one third from 7,882 cases in 2010 to 10,873 cases in 2012.

Around 160,000 people are living with chronic hepatitis C virus infection in England, many of whom are unaware of their infection. In London an estimated 58,000 people are infected with hepatitis C of whom an estimated 40% remain undiagnosed.

Injecting drug use remains a major risk factor for hepatitis C infection and the prevalence of infection amongst people in England currently injecting drugs is markedly higher in London (23,000) and the North West region (20,000) compared to the rest of England (45,000).

In the past 10 years sex between men has also emerged as an important route of transmission for hepatitis C, particularly among those already infected with HIV.

Dr Yvonne Doyle, regional director for PHE London, said:

“Hepatitis C remains an ongoing public health problem in London and could result in great costs to our city in the future, not only in terms of deaths and poor health due to chronic disease, but also in treatment costs as a result of complications of the infection.

“While there has been an increase in confirmed cases of hepatitis C infection in London, partly as a result of increased testing and partly because of improved laboratory reporting, sadly, many people who are chronically infected remain unaware of their infection.

“For many people, it can be several years or even decades before they develop symptoms of hepatitis C. It is therefore vital to raise awareness about this condition so that more people are diagnosed and treated. Antiviral therapies exist that will clear the virus in most cases, yet only around three per cent of the chronically infected population in England access them each year.

“The first step in getting people treated is to get them tested for hepatitis C. Therefore it is good news that more people than ever are being diagnosed. However to prevent more deaths and serious illness, we must ensure that these patients can access effective treatment and potential cure.

“Preventing new hepatitis C infections, raising awareness of infection, increasing testing and diagnosis and getting diagnosed people into treatment are the cornerstone public health measures for this disease. We encourage local authorities and NHS colleagues to absorb the recommendations in this report and take local action to drive improvements in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C infection. PHE is committed to working in partnership with other organisations to tackle this issue and help reduce the future burden of hepatitis C-related disease that has been predicted.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. PHE Hepatitis in the UK Report (2013) – available from Thursday 25 July:
www.hpa.org.uk/Publications/InfectiousDiseases/BloodBorneInfections/HepatitisCInTheUK/
2. For the most recently published ‘Hepatitis C in London’ report (2011 data):
www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317135974202
3. For more information about hepatitis C, please visit:
www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/HepatitisC/
4. For information and support, please visit The Hepatitis C Trust: www.hepctrust.org.uk/
5. For information about liver disease, please visit the British Liver Trust:
www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/
6. Hepatitis C is an infectious disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The virus causes inflammation of the liver, and if left untreated, can result in chronic liver disease, liver failure, or even death. As the liver can still operate even when damaged, many people are unaware they have the disease at first because they have no symptoms. It is often only when the liver becomes seriously damaged that symptoms occur and people report to their doctor.
7. Others at risk of hepatitis C include those who have received blood transfusions before September 1991 or blood products before 1986 in the UK. Individuals who originate from countries where hepatitis C is endemic are also at risk, often because they have undergone medical or dental treatment with unsterile equipment in their country of origin.
8. Enhanced surveillance of newly acquired HCV infection in men who have sex with men (MSM) provides evidence of ongoing, but declining sexual transmission of HCV among HIV-positive MSM in England.
9. Public Health England’s mission is to protect and improve the nation’s health and to address inequalities through working with national and local government, the NHS, industry and the voluntary and community sector. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. www.gov.uk/phe Follow us on Twitter @PHE_London

Issued by:

Public Health England

London press office

Tel: 020 7811 7243 / 7242

Out of hours telephone 0208 200 4400

Email: london-pressoffice@phe.gov.uk