

Factsheet 4

Hepatitis: Policy factsheet

Why free, confidential and voluntary hepatitis testing needs to be a national priority

Fast facts

- **Hepatitis** continues to be **an active epidemic across Europe**. **Increasing access to, and acceptance of, free, confidential and voluntary hepatitis testing** including linkage to treatment and care needs to be a priority for governments across Europe
- An estimated **15 million people** are living with **hepatitis B** and **14 million with hepatitis C** in the WHO European Region*^{1,2}
- In **[insert country]**, approximately **[insert number]** people are living with hepatitis B and **[insert number]** with hepatitis C **[regional data can be found [here](#) (p93 onwards)]**
- The majority of people living with hepatitis C in Europe are **unaware of their status**⁴
- **There are more new hepatitis infections and late diagnoses** when access to free, confidential and voluntary testing is limited
- **Adopting European hepatitis testing guidelines** and/or implementing national guidelines to offer free, confidential and voluntary hepatitis testing can help reduce the long term economic burden of hepatitis

Hepatitis continues to be an active epidemic in Europe

- In the WHO European Region,* an estimated **15 million people** are living with **hepatitis B** and **14 million with hepatitis C**^{1,2}
- In **[insert country]**, approximately **[insert number]** people are living with hepatitis B and **[insert number]** with hepatitis C **[regional data can be found [here](#) (p93 onwards)]**
- **Late diagnosis** and **delayed access to treatment** are the most important factors associated with preventable related illnesses and death, as well as onward transmission of hepatitis to others

Hepatitis testing is cost effective

- Late presentation for hepatitis care is **more costly** for the healthcare system^{3,4,5,6,7}

- Numerous studies suggest that hepatitis B treatments are cost effective even though they need to be taken indefinitely³
- While the newest hepatitis C treatments are expensive, analyses from several countries show they are still cost effective,^{4,5,6,7} as curing hepatitis C reduces costly health problems such as liver cancer and liver transplant
- New testing technology offers a variety of cost-effective rapid testing kits that are now available across Europe and should be used to improve access to testing

There are more new hepatitis infections and late diagnoses when access to free, confidential and voluntary testing is limited

- Guilt and fear associated with hepatitis, reinforced by societal stigma, can prevent people from getting tested
- Hepatitis testing guidelines should state that hepatitis testing can take place in the community, via outreach programmes by peers and/or medical staff, as well as healthcare settings, using blood testing kits or oral swabs

Steps to overcome barriers to increasing access to and uptake of free, confidential and voluntary hepatitis testing

1. **Tackle** any patient, healthcare provider or institutional/policy-level **barriers** that are preventing the introduction of hepatitis testing initiatives
2. **Adopt European hepatitis testing guidelines**, e.g. the 2018 [ECDC Public health guidance on HIV, hepatitis B and C testing in the EU/EEA](#), or implement national ones to offer free, confidential and voluntary hepatitis testing
3. **Reduce stigma** associated with hepatitis by communicating the benefits of hepatitis testing and treatment advances to populations at higher risk of hepatitis and those who should be offering tests

***Countries in the WHO European Region**

Western: Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

Central: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey.

Eastern: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

References

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