

Hepatitis C

Reporting on data retrieved from TESSy* on 19 November 2015

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Key facts

- In 2014, 35 321 cases of hepatitis C were reported from 28 EU/EEA Member States, a crude rate of 8.8 cases per 100 000 population.
- Of the cases reported, 1.3% were classified as acute, 13.3% as chronic, 74.7% as 'unknown' and 10.7% were not classified.
- Hepatitis C is more commonly reported among men than women, with a male-to-female ratio of 1.8 to 1. Just over half (51.3%) of all hepatitis C cases reported in 2014 were aged between 25 and 44 years, and 8.0% of cases were under 25 years of age.
- Only 15.8% of the cases included data on the mode of transmission and of these the most commonly reported was injecting drug use, which accounted for 78.1% of those cases with complete information on transmission status.
- Between 2006 and 2014, the overall number of cases diagnosed and reported across all EU/EEA Member States increased by 28.7%, with most of this increase observed since 2010.
- The interpretation of hepatitis C data across countries is hampered by differences in surveillance systems, testing practices and programmes, and difficulties in defining the cases as acute or chronic. The surveillance of hepatitis C, a disease which is largely asymptomatic until a late stage, is challenging, with reported notifications reflecting testing practices rather than true occurrence of disease.

Methods

[Click here for a detailed description of the methods used to produce this annual report](#)

This report includes data on newly diagnosed cases of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection reported to ECDC by EU/EEA countries. Countries were requested to follow the EU 2012 case definition for reporting at the European level*, but other case definitions were also accepted.

* 2012/506/EC: Commission Implementing Decision of 8 August 2012 amending Decision 2002/253/EC laying down case definitions for reporting communicable diseases to the Community network under Decision No 2119/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Acute and chronic hepatitis C infections were differentiated by countries using defined criteria (Table 1).

Table 1. Criteria for differentiating acute and chronic hepatitis C

Stage	Definition
Acute	Recent HCV seroconversion (prior negative test for hepatitis C in last 12 months) or Detection of hepatitis C virus nucleic acid (HCV RNA) or hepatitis C virus core antigen (HCV-core) in serum/plasma and no detection of hepatitis C virus antibody (negative result)
Chronic	Detection of hepatitis C virus nucleic acid (HCV RNA) or hepatitis C core antigen (HCV-core) in serum/plasma in two samples taken at least 12 months apart*
Unknown	Any newly diagnosed case which cannot be classified in accordance with the above definition of acute or chronic infection

* In the event that the case was not notified the first time.

Surveillance systems across the EU/EEA countries are heterogeneous (Annex). Fourteen countries submitted national data in 2014 based on the current EU case definition (two countries less than in 2013). Seven countries used the previous 2008 EU case definition, and seven countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Romania) used national case definitions. The EU 2012 case definition is fairly similar to the EU 2008 case definition, but includes detection of hepatitis C core antigen as an additional diagnostic criterion. Both case definitions capture all acute and chronic laboratory-diagnosed cases of hepatitis C. All reported cases were included in the analysis, regardless of which case definition was used. The data collected represent confirmed cases; however, a few countries submitted 'probable' cases using alternative case definitions.

Several countries made changes to their surveillance systems during the last few years and, for a few countries, historical data were not included as they would not have been comparable with the subsequent enhanced data. Hepatitis C data are presented by date of diagnosis, or, if not available, by 'date used for statistics'. When comparing data defined according to the two different dates across the database, there were only minor differences between them, and only in a few countries.

Italy reports data using two data sources. One of these sources has national coverage, but includes only a limited number of variables and was used for the calculation of national rates and analysis by age and gender. The other data source is a sentinel system covering an estimated 76% of the population and includes epidemiological data on a range of variables. The sentinel population is considered representative of the wider population, and the data provided were scaled up from 76% to 100%. This source was used for epidemiological analyses including the route of transmission and importation status.

The data source for Belgium is a sentinel system with unknown population coverage. National rates were therefore not calculated for Belgium.

Epidemiology: overall trends

In 2014, 28 EU/EEA Member States reported 35 321 cases (crude rate of 8.8 per 100 000 population) of HCV infection (no data from France, Liechtenstein and Spain), an increase of 15.4% over the previous year. Between 2006 and 2014, the number of cases has increased by 28.7% from 27 442 cases in 2006, with the rate across all countries fluctuating between 7.3 and 9.4 per 100 000 population but showing a steady increase since 2010 (Figure 1). Of 35 321 cases, 458 (1.3%) were reported as acute, 4 698 (13.3%) as chronic, 26 380 cases (74.7%) were reported as 'unknown', and 3 785 cases (10.7%) could not be classified due to an incompatible data format.

Country-specific rates ranged from 0.1 cases per 100 000 in Italy to 74.5 cases per 100 000 in Latvia. The United Kingdom accounted for 39.7% of all reported cases.

Table 2. Number and rate of reported hepatitis C cases per 100 000 population, EU/EEA, 2010–2014†

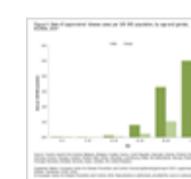
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Country	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		Acute*		Chronic*		Unknown*			
	Cases	Rate	Cases	Rate	Cases	Rate	Cases	Rate										
Austria	880	10.5	1122	13.4	1075	12.8	993	11.7	1954	23	93	1.1	913	10.7	948	11.1		
Belgium	58	0.8	60	0.8	92	1.3	95	1.3	90	1.2					1151			
Croatia					171	4	202	4.7	144	3.4								
Cyprus	26	3.2	57	6.8	48	5.6	36	4.2	30	3.5					30	3.5		
Czech Republic	709	6.8	812	7.7	796	7.6	929	8.8	808	7.7					808	7.7		
Denmark	318	5.7	295	5.3	263	4.7	265	4.7	181	3.2	6	0.1	173	3.1	2	0		
Estonia	276	20.7	210	15.8	245	18.5	273	20.7	315	23.9	20	1.5	295	22.4				
Finland	1138	21.3	1135	21.1	1165	21.6	1172	21.6	1224	22.5					1224	22.5		
France																		
Germany	5281	6.5	5075	6.2	4978	6.1	5168	6.3	5737	7.1					5737	7.1		
Greece	11	0.1	18	0.2	43	0.4	22	0.2	18	0.2	2	<0.1	16	0.1				
Hungary	11	0.1	43	0.4	38	0.4	46	0.5	43	0.4	43	0.4						
Iceland	59	18.6	72	22.6	51	16	72	22.4	38	11.7					38	11.7		
Ireland	1240	27.3	1254	27.4	1026	22.4	778	16.9	694	15.1	21	0.5	68	1.5	605	13.1		
Italy	236	0.4	234	0.4	221	0.4	205	0.3	45	0.1					45	0.1		
Lithuania	1156	54.5	1324	63.8	1352	66.1	1327	65.6	1491	74.5	57	2.8	1434	71.6				
Luxembourg	73	14.5	74	14.5	53	10.1	68	12.7	68	12.4					68	12.4		
Malta	14	3.4	18	4.3	24	5.7	14	3.3	14	3.3	1	0.2	13	3.1				
Netherlands	31	0.2	68	0.4	57	0.3	65	0.4	52	0.3	52	0.3						
Norway	1783	36.7	1675	34	1513	30.3	1318	26.1	1213	23.7					1213	23.7		
Poland	2179	5.7	2241	5.9	2265	6	2641	6.9	3551	9.3					56	0.5		
Portugal	39	0.4	45	0.4	42	0.4	21	0.2	63	0.6	7	0.1						
Romania	76	0.4	80	0.4	126	0.6	127	0.6	104	0.5	84	0.4	20	0.1				
Slovakia	237	4.4	304	5.6	230	4.3	314	5.8	381	7	35	0.6	346	6.4				
Slovenia	87	4.3	95	4.6	102	5	89	4.3	64	3.1	3	0.1	61	3				
Spain															1786	18.5		
Sweden	1939	20.8	2153	22.9	1990	21	2005	21	1786	18.5								
United Kingdom	9951	15.9	12138	19.3	13474	21.2	13757	21.5	14028	21.8					1291	2	12737	19.8
Total EU/EEA	27849	7.3	30645	8	31480	8.1	32061	8.3	35321	8.8	458	0.5	4698	3.7	26380	9.5		

† Data presented by date of diagnosis.

* Includes the cases reported by countries as acute, chronic or unknown using the differentiation criteria.

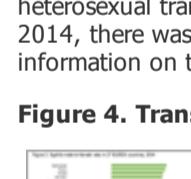
Figure 1. Rate of reported hepatitis C cases per 100 000 population, EU/EEA, 2006–2014



Source: Country reports from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

In 2014, 14 countries were able to provide data on acute cases (Table 2). The rate of reported acute cases ranged from <0.1 cases per 100 000 in Greece to 2.8 in Latvia. Two countries submitted data on chronic infections, ranging from 0.1 cases per 100 000 in Greece and Romania to 71.6 in Latvia. Figure 2 shows the overall notification rate of hepatitis C cases in EU/EEA countries in 2014. Countries were included if their surveillance system was known by ECDC to capture data on both acute and chronic cases, even if most cases were classified as 'unknown'. Notification rates were higher in central and north European countries than in south-eastern European countries.

Figure 2. Rate of reported hepatitis C cases per 100 000 population, EU/EEA, 2014



Source: Country reports from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia,