

Health Protection Surveillance Centre

Introduction

Hepatitis C became a notifiable disease under an amendment to the Infectious Diseases Regulations 1981, implemented on 1st January 2004 (S.I 707 of 2003). Prior to this, cases of hepatitis C could be notified as “viral hepatitis type unspecified”.

Results

There were 315 notifications of hepatitis C in quarter 4 2010. This corresponds to a crude notification rate of 7.4 per 100,000 population and represents a slight decrease to the number and rates for the previous quarter (n=338) (figure 1).

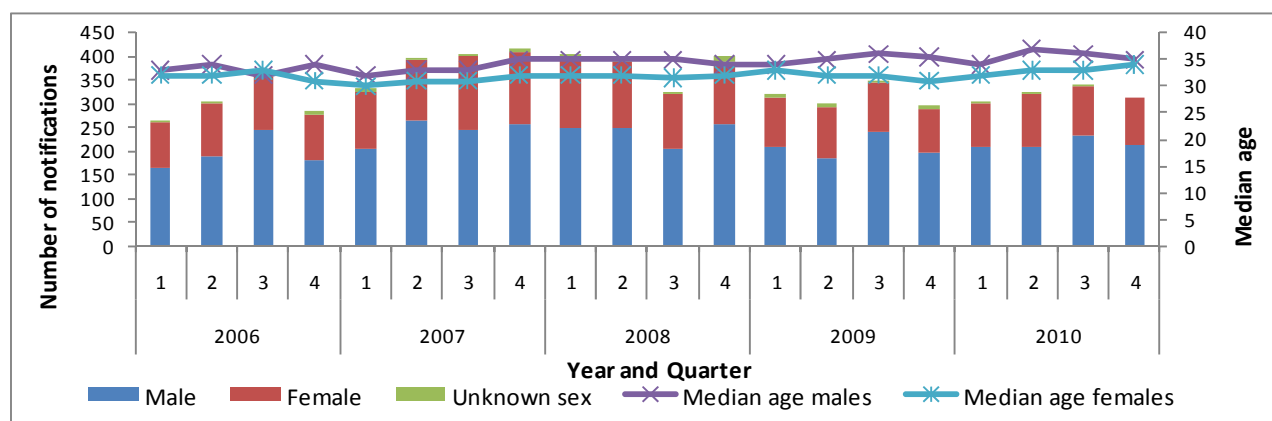


Figure 1. Number of notifications of hepatitis C and median age at notification by sex Q1 2006 to Q4 2010

Geographic distribution

Notification rates for each HSE area for the past four quarters are shown in figure 2. Rates have been highest in the HSE-East every quarter since hepatitis C became notifiable. Seventy three percent (n=231) of Q4 cases were reported by the HSE-East in 2010. This corresponds to a notification rate of 15.4 per 100,000 population.

Age and sex

Sex was known for all cases of hepatitis C notified in Q4 2010. Sixty seven percent were male. The age distributions were slightly different for males and females. Female cases were marginally younger overall, with a median age at notification of 34 years, compared to 35 years for males. Seventy five percent of cases notified in Q4 2010 were aged between 25 and 44 years (figures 1 & 3).

Risk factor data

Information on most likely risk factor was available for 55% (n=173) of cases in Q4. Of these, 71% (n=122) were injecting drug users. Other reported exposures or risk categories included being born in an endemic country (n=19), possible sexual exposure (n=15), receipt of blood or blood products outside of Ireland or in Ireland in the past (n=6) and vertical transmission (n=3).

Provisional summary of 2010 data

Hepatitis C data for 2010 have not yet been fully validated. However provisional data indicate a slight increase (1.2%) in notifications, with 1,282 cases reported in 2010, compared with 1,266 cases reported in 2009. The age, sex and geographic distribution of cases were similar to 2009. Males continued to predominate and accounted for 67% (n=863) of cases where sex was known. The median age at

notification for females was younger than that for males at 31 years compared to 34 years. 76% of all cases were notified by the HSE-E (n=977). Some data on most likely risk factor was available for 57% of all 2010 cases (n=733). The most commonly reported risk factor was injecting drug use (n=570, 78%).

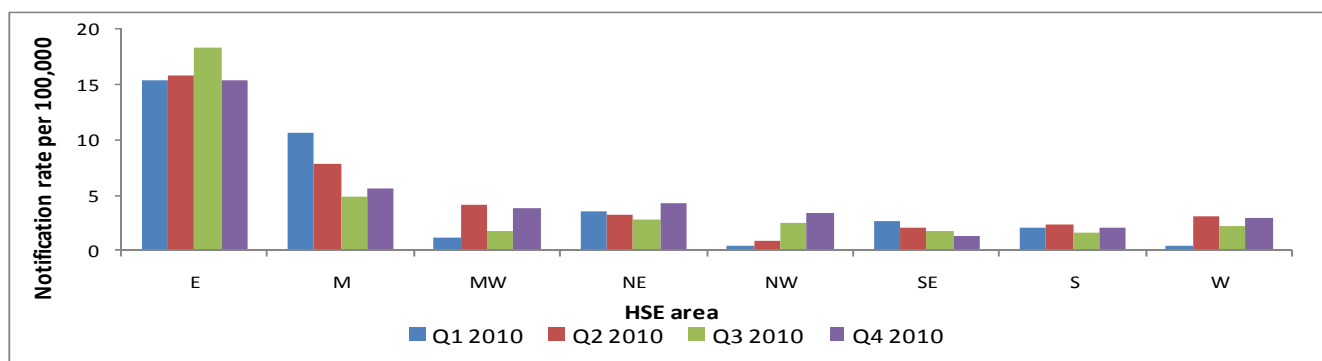


Figure 2. Hepatitis C notification rates per 100,000 population by HSE area from Q1 2010 to Q4 2010

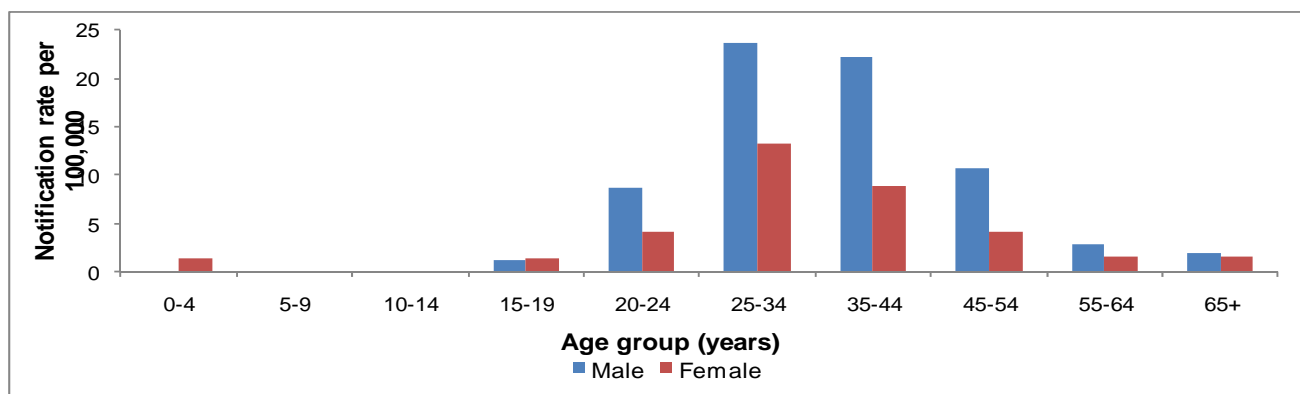


Figure 3. Age and sex specific rates per 100,000 population for hepatitis C notifications, Q 4 2010

Discussion

There was a 7% decrease in the number of hepatitis C notifications in Q4 2010 (n=315) compared with Q3 2010 (n=338). However, the overall numbers are lower compared to the high notifications rates in 2007 and 2008. Following trends from previous years, males predominated and accounted for 67% of all new cases. Following previous trends, where risk factor data were available, the vast majority of cases (71%) in Q4 2010 have acquired their infection through injecting drug use.

With reference to the provisional annual data for 2010, the age, sex and geographic distributions of cases have been similar each year since hepatitis C became notifiable in 2004. Approximately two thirds of cases are male and most cases are in young to middle aged adults. Where data on risk factor are available, the main transmission route is through injecting drug use.

Acknowledgements

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Case definition for hepatitis C¹

Clinical description: In symptomatic cases, clinical picture compatible with hepatitis, i.e. discrete onset of symptoms and/or jaundice or elevated serum aminotransferase levels. Asymptomatic cases are common.

Laboratory criteria for diagnosis

One of the following:

- Detection of hepatitis C virus (HCV) specific antibodies
- Detection of HCV nucleic acid from clinical sample confirmed

Case classification

Possible: N/A

Probable: N/A

Confirmed: A case that is laboratory confirmed

1. Case definitions for notifiable diseases. Infectious Diseases (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2003 (SI No. 707 of 2003). National Disease Surveillance Centre, February 2004.

All data contained in this report are provisional (CIDR accessed 5th March 2011)