

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 269 notifications of hepatitis C in quarter 1 2012. This corresponds to a crude notification rate of 6.3 per 100,000 population and is slightly lower than quarter 4 2011 (n=287).

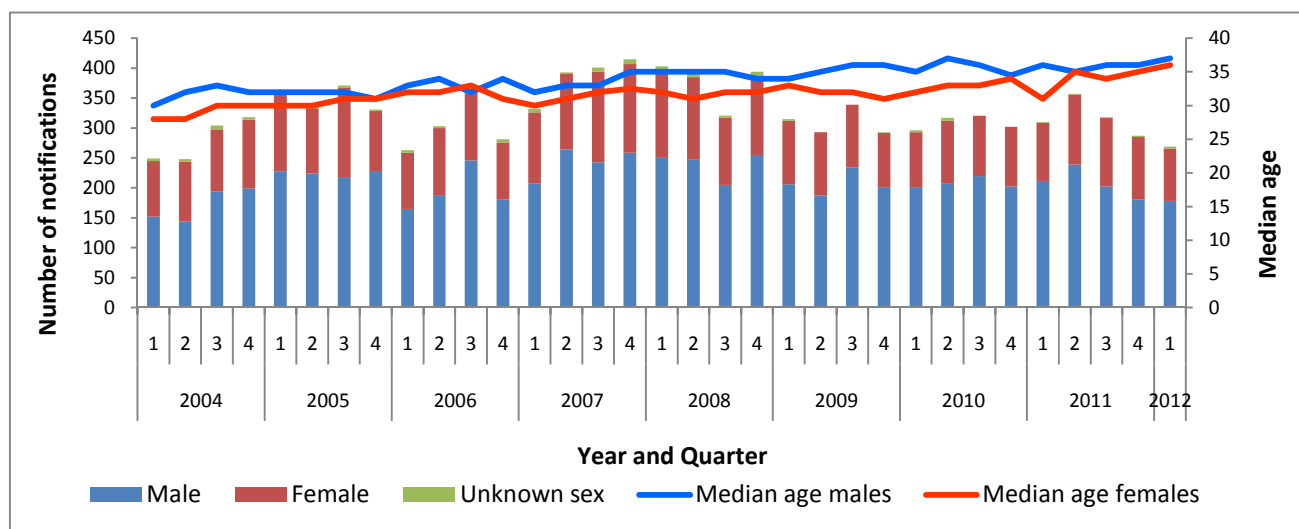


Figure 1. Number of notifications of hepatitis C and median age at notification, by sex, Q1 2004 to Q4 2011

Geographic distribution

Notification rates for each HSE area for the past four quarters are shown figure 2. Rates have been highest in the HSE-East every quarter since hepatitis C became notifiable. Seventy eight percent (n=209) of Q1 cases were reported by the HSE-East in 2012. This corresponds to a notification rate of 13.9 per 100,000 population.

Age and sex

Sixty six percent of hepatitis C cases in Q1 were male, 33% were female and sex was not known for three cases. The median age at notification was 37 years for males and 36 years for females. Sixty six percent (n=177) of cases were aged between 25 and 44 years (figures 1 & 3).

Risk factor data

Information on most likely risk factor was available for 56% (n=151) of Q1 cases. Eighty five percent of these were injecting drug users (n=129), 5% were infected through blood or blood products (n=7), 4% were born in endemic countries (n=6) and 3% were likely to have been acquired sexually (n=4). Where data were available on those infected through blood or blood products in Ireland, infection occurred many years in the past.

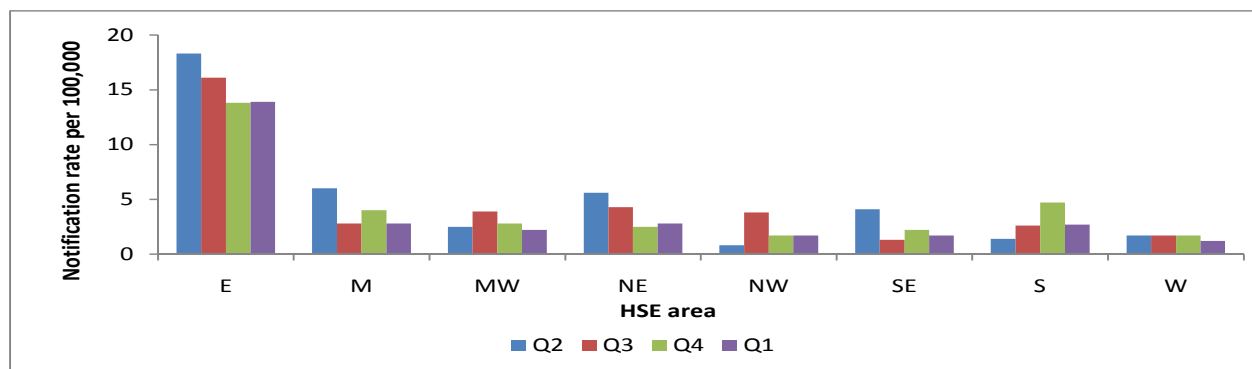


Figure 2. Hepatitis C notification rates per 100,000 population, by HSE area, Q2 2011 to Q1 2012

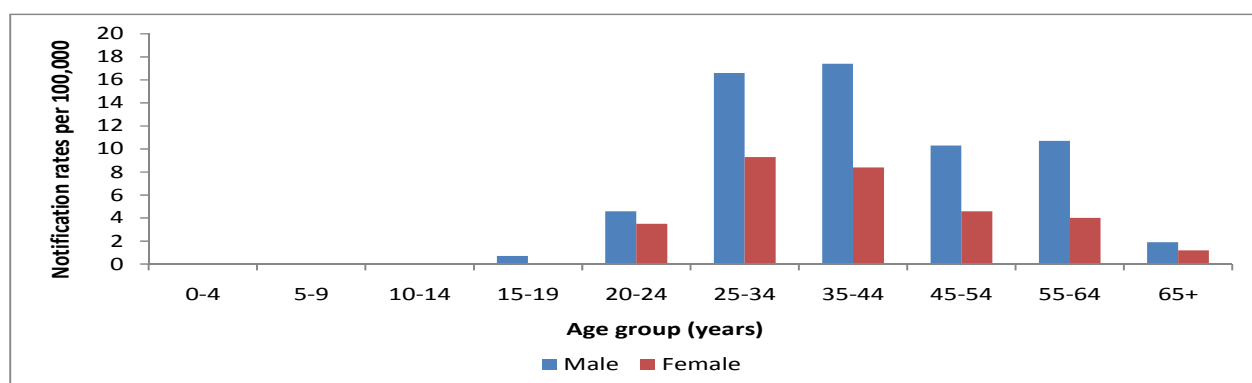


Figure 3. Age and sex specific rates per 100,000 population for hepatitis C notifications, Q1 2012

Discussion

The number of hepatitis C notifications in Q1 2012 (n=269) has decreased by 6% compared to Q4 2011 (n=287), and by 15% compared to the same period last year (n=318). The overall numbers of hepatitis C notifications continue to be lower than the high notification rates of 2007 and 2008. However, the overall trends remain the same with males accounting for 66% of all new cases. The median age at notification for males at 37 years was almost the same as that for females at 36 years. Where risk factor data were available, the vast majority of cases (85%) in Q1 2012 have acquired their infection through injecting drug use.

Acknowledgements

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Case definition for hepatitis C

Clinical criteria Not relevant for surveillance purposes. *Epidemiological criteria* Not relevant for surveillance purposes.

Laboratory criteria for diagnosis

Hepatitis C (acute)

At least one of the following two:

- Recent HCV seroconversion (prior negative test for hepatitis C in last 12 months)
- 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)
- Detection of hepatitis C virus nucleic acid (HCV RNA)
- Detection of hepatitis C virus core antigen (HCV-core)
- Hepatitis C virus specific antibody (anti-HCV) response confirmed by a confirmatory (e.g. immunoblot) antibody test in persons older than 18 months without evidence of resolved infection*

Hepatitis C (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

Hepatitis C (unknown status)

Any case which cannot be classified according to the above description of acute or chronic infection and having at least one of the following three:

Case classification

Possible: N/A
Probable: N/A
Confirmed: Any person meeting the laboratory criteria

Note: Resolved infection should not be notified

*Resolved infection: Detection of hepatitis C virus antibody and no detection of hepatitis C virus nucleic acid (HCV RNA negative result) or hepatitis C virus core antigen (HCV-core negative result) in serum/plasma

All data contained in this report are provisional (CIDR accessed 13th June 2012)

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