

Report on Hepatitis C Notifications in Q4 2008 & provisional 2008 summary

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 405 notifications of hepatitis C in quarter four 2008. This corresponds to a crude quarterly notification rate of 9.6 per 100,000 population. This was an increase compared to Q3, but was very similar to the number of cases for Q1 and Q2 (figure 1).

Geographic distribution

Notification rates for each HSE area for the past four quarters are shown figure 2. Seventy five percent (n=303) of Q4 cases were reported by the HSE-E (20.2 per 100,000 population).

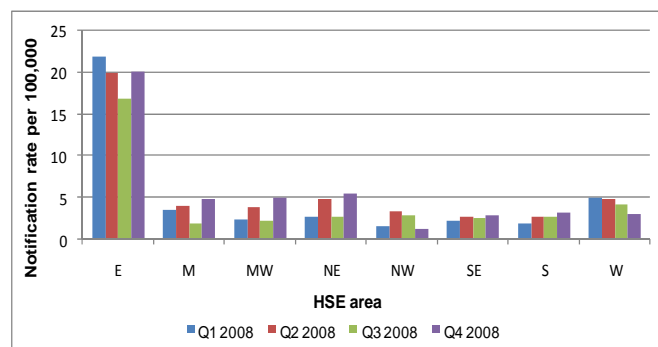


Figure 2. Notification rates per 100,000 population for hepatitis C by HSE area for the past four quarters

Age and sex

Sixty four percent (n=259) of Q4 cases were male, 33% (n=135) were female and sex was unknown for eleven cases. The age distributions were slightly different for males and females. Female cases were younger overall, with a median age at notification of 32 years compared to 34 years for males. Seventy two percent (n=293) of Q4 cases were aged between 25 and 44 years at notification (figures 1 & 3).

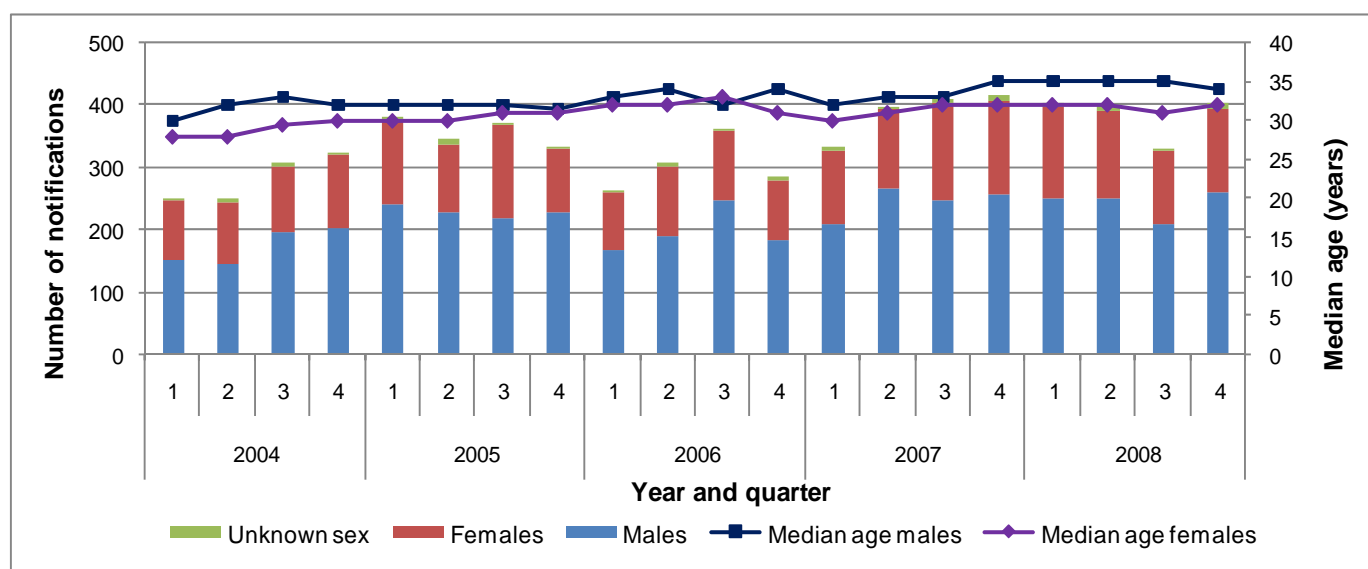


Figure 1. Number of notifications of hepatitis C and median age at notification by sex, Q1 2004 – Q4 2008

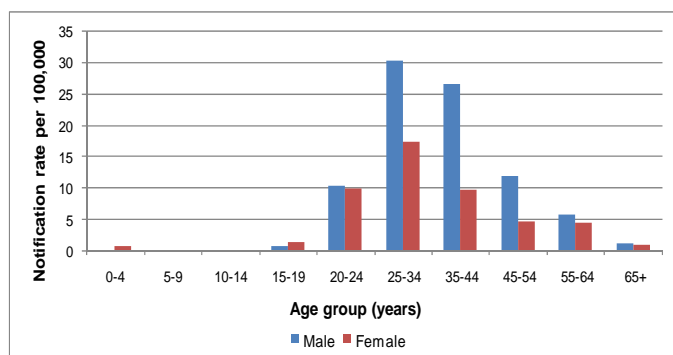


Figure 3. Age and sex specific rates per 100,000 population for hepatitis C notifications in Q4 2008

Risk factor data

Information on most likely risk factor was available for 45% of cases in Q4 2008 (n=183). Of these, 80% (n=147) were injecting drug users. Overall, 25% (n=103) of Q4 cases had been diagnosed previously but were notified for the first time in Q4 2008.

2008 summary (provisional)

Hepatitis C data for 2008 have not yet been fully validated. However, provisional data indicate similar notification rates to 2007, with 1,540 cases reported in 2008, compared to 1,558 in 2007.

The age, sex and geographic distribution of cases was also very similar to 2007. Males continued to predominate and accounted for 64% (n=968) of cases where sex was known. The median age at notification for females was younger than that for males at 32 years compared to 35 years. Seventy seven percent of all cases were notified by the HSE-E (n=1,183).

Some data on most likely risk factor were available for 37% of 2008 cases (n=569). The most commonly reported risk factor was injecting

drug use (n=443, 78%). Twenty three percent (n=355) of cases notified in 2008 were known to have been previously diagnosed but not previously notified.

Discussion

The age, sex and geographic distributions of cases have been similar each quarter since hepatitis C became notifiable in January 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 predominant mode of transmission for new diagnoses is injecting drug use.

The number of cases of hepatitis C notified has been higher in past two years than in previous years. However, hepatitis C notification trends can be difficult to interpret. Most cases are initially asymptomatic and diagnosis is usually a result of the testing of people identified as being at risk, some of whom may have been infected for many years.

In addition, current notifications may include some cases that were diagnosed before 2004 (when hepatitis C first became notifiable), for whom repeat testing has been carried out now. There is also likely to be some duplication of notifications as Departments of Public Health do not always receive full names and thus cannot always identify if a patient has been notified previously.

Acknowledgements

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Report by Niamh Murphy and Dr Lelia Thornton
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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

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 16th February 2009)