

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 348 notifications of hepatitis C in quarter 3 2009 and 296 in quarter 4. These correspond to crude notification rates of 8.2 and 7.0 per 100,000 population and are similar to the numbers and rates for the previous two quarters (figure 1).

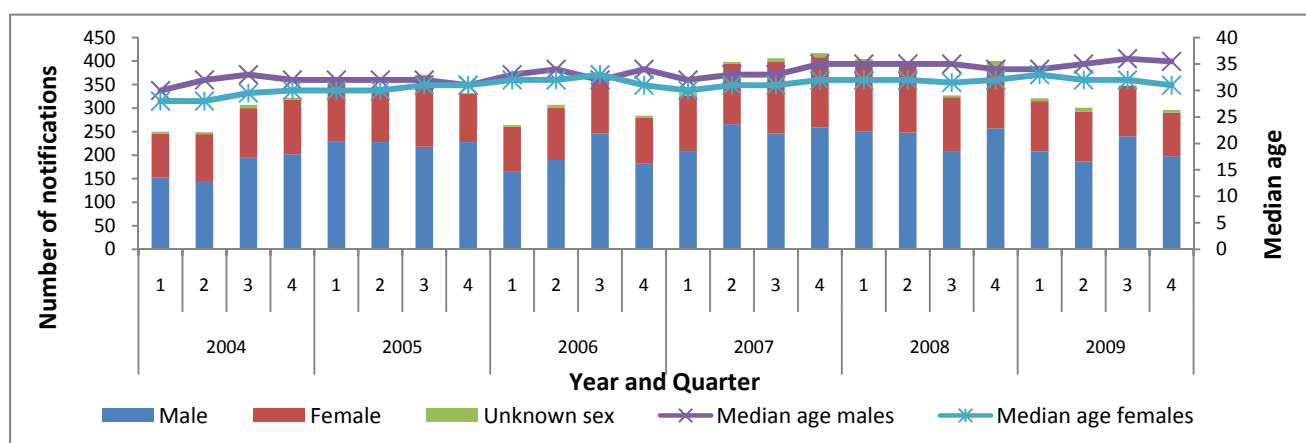


Figure 1. Number of notifications of hepatitis C and median age at notification by sex, Q1 2004 – Q4 2009

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 three percent of Q3 cases and 74% of Q4 cases were reported by the HSE-East. These correspond to notification rates of 16.9 and 14.7 per 100,000 population.

Age and sex

Sex was known for 99% of cases of hepatitis C notified in Q3 and Q4 2009. Sixty nine percent were male. 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 36 years for males. Seventy percent of cases notified in Q3 and Q4 were aged between 25 and 44 years (figures 1 & 3).

Risk factor data

Information on most likely risk factor was available for 40% (n=258) of cases in Q3 and Q4. Of these, 67% (n=173) were injecting drug users and 12% (n=31) reported having no known risk factor. Other reported exposures or risk categories included receipt of blood or blood products outside of Ireland or in Ireland in the past, and being an asylum seeker or prisoner.

Provisional summary of 2009 data

Hepatitis C data for 2009 have not yet been fully validated. However, provisional data indicate a 17% decrease in notifications, with 1,266 cases reported in 2009, compared to 1,529 in 2008.

All data contained in this report are provisional (CIDR accessed 23rd March 2010)

The age, sex and geographic distribution of cases was similar to 2008. Males continued to predominate and accounted for 67% (n=833) 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 four percent of all cases were notified by the HSE-E (n=936). Some data on most likely risk factor were available for 40% of 2009 cases (n=507). The most commonly reported risk factor was injecting drug use (n=362, 71%).

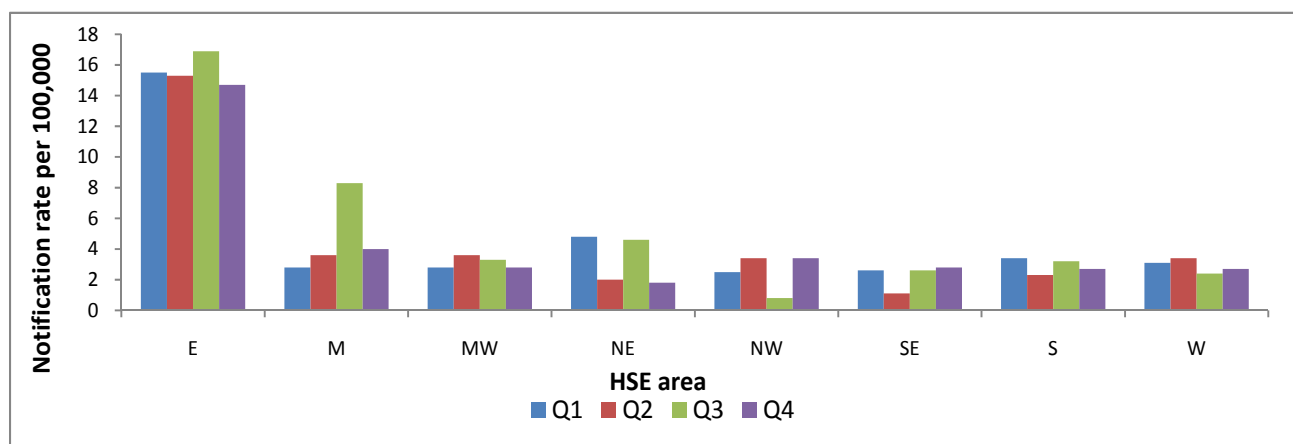


Figure 2. Hepatitis C notification rates per 100,000 population by HSE area for Q1 to Q4, 2009

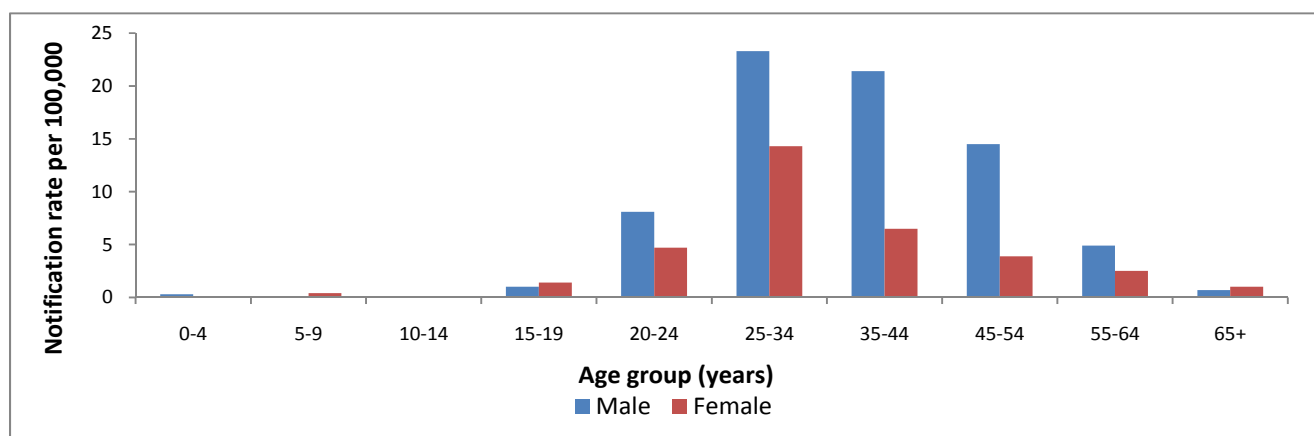


Figure 3. Quarterly age and sex specific rates per 100,000 population for hepatitis C notifications, Q3 & Q4 2009 (rates were averaged over the two quarters)

Discussion

The number of hepatitis C notifications in Q3 and Q4 2009 were similar to the previous two quarters, continuing a downward trend compared to 2007 and 2008. Where risk factor data were available, the vast majority of cases notified in 2009 were likely to have been acquired 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.

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