

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 304 notifications of hepatitis C in quarter 1 2010. This corresponds to a crude notification rate of 7.2 per 100,000 population and is similar to the numbers and rates for the previous quarter (figure 1).

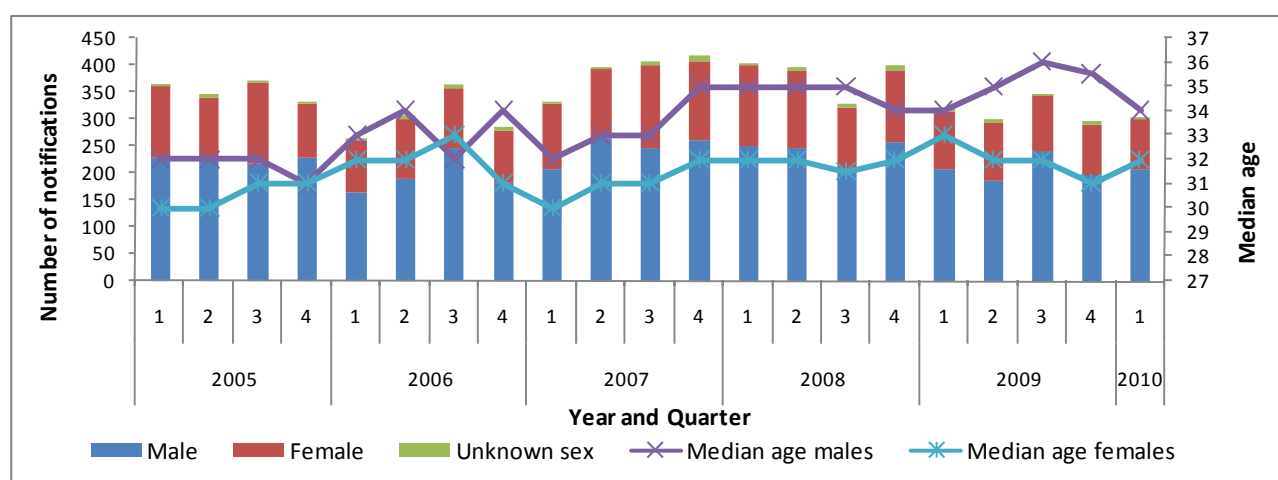


Figure 1. Number of notifications of hepatitis C and median age at notification by sex Q1 2005 to Q1 2010

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 six percent (n=231) of Q1 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 reported for 99% of cases of hepatitis C notified in Q1 2010. 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 34 years for males. Seventy one percent of cases notified in Q1 2010 were aged between 25 and 44 years (figures 1 & 3).

Risk factor data

Information on most likely risk factor was available for 66% (n=200) of cases in Q1. Of these, 81% (n=162) were injecting drug users. Other reported exposures or risk categories included receipt of blood or blood products outside of Ireland, or in Ireland in the past (n=7), possible sexual exposure (n=9), having been born in an endemic country (n=5), being an asylum seeker (n=4) or prisoner (n=4).

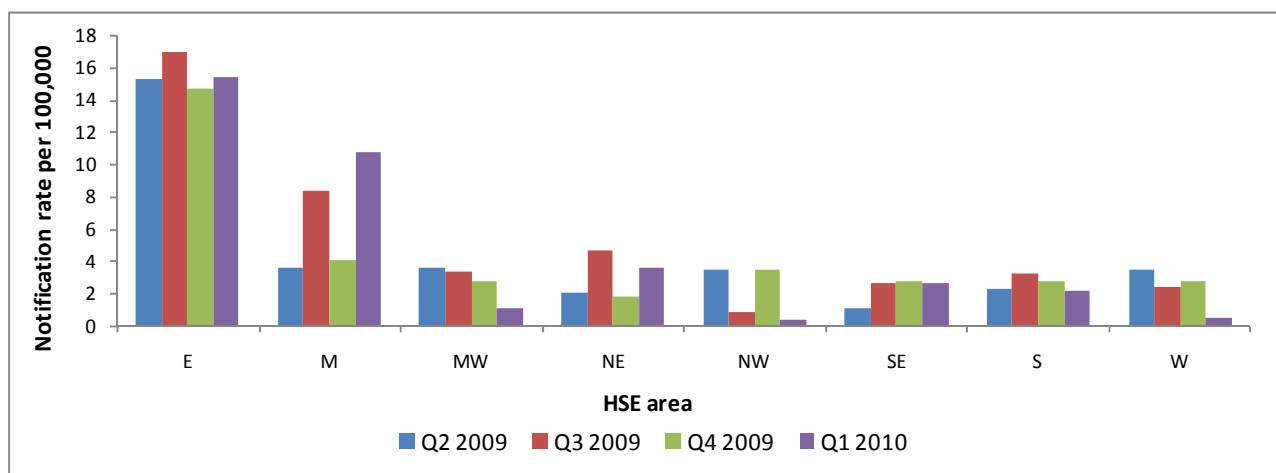


Figure 2. Hepatitis C notification rates per 100,000 population by HSE area from Q2 2009 to Q1 2010

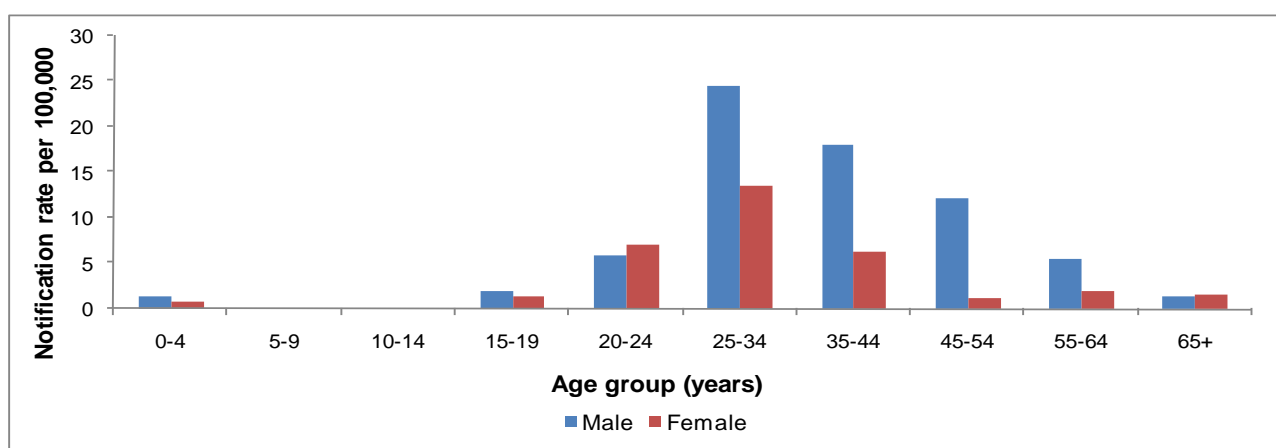


Figure 3. Age and sex specific rates per 100,000 population for hepatitis C notifications, Q 1 2010

Discussion

The number of hepatitis C notifications increased slightly in Q1 2010 compared to Q1 2009. However, the overall numbers continue to decrease compared to the high notifications rates in 2007 and 2008. Following trends from previous years, males predominated and accounted for 69% (n=208) of all new cases. The median age at notification for males at 34 years is slightly higher than that for females at 32 years. Where risk factor data were available, the vast majority of cases (81%) notified so far in 2010 have acquired their infection 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 19th May 2010)