Quarterly Report on Hepatitis C Notifications

The National Disease Surveillance Centre

Quarter 1 2004

27 April 2004

Summary

There were 103 notifications of hepatitis C in the first quarter of 2004. The sex distribution of cases was approximately equal. However, the number of females peaked in the 25-29 year age group, while there were two peaks in the males, in those aged 25-29 years and 40-49 years. The ERHA reported the vast majority of cases (89%). The case classification and source of notification was not available for most cases.

Introduction

Hepatitis C became a notifiable disease under an amendment to the Infectious Disease Regulations 1981, implemented on 1st January 2004 (S.I. 707 of 2003). This amendment also requires laboratory directors to report cases of notifiable diseases identified in their laboratories. Previously hepatitis C may have been notified as viral hepatitis type unspecified. The recent changes should have a positive impact on the quality of information available on hepatitis C in Ireland.

This is a summary of the notifications of hepatitis C made to NDSC by the health boards in the first quarter of 2004.

Results

There were 103 notifications in the first quarter of 2004. There are no directly comparable data from previous years as hepatitis C was not notifiable. A comparison is made here with viral hepatitis type unspecified.
There was a large increase compared to the number of viral hepatitis type unspecified notified per quarter since 2001 (figure 1).

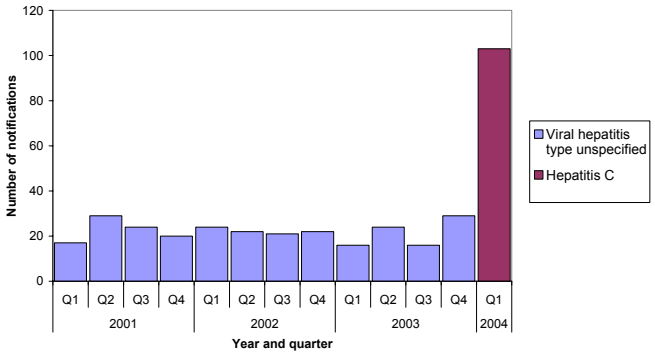

Figure 1. Number of notifications of viral hepatitis type unspecified Q1 2001-Q4 2003 and hepatitis C Q1 2004

Geographic distribution

The number of hepatitis C notified by each health board compared to previous years can be seen in table 1 and figure 2. The excess cases in quarter 1 2004 (compared to viral hepatitis type unspecified) was almost entirely in the ERHA.

Table 1. Number of notifications by health board of viral hepatitis type unspecified Q1 2003 and total 2003, and hepatitis C Q 1 2004 and total year to date 2004

Health Board	*Unspec. Q1 2003*	*Unspec. Total 2003*	*Hep C Q1 2004*	*Total Hep C 2004 (to date)*
ERHA	5	36	92	92
MHB	2	9	1	1
MWHB	1	4	0	0
NEHB	2	2	2	2
NWHB	1	3	1	1
SEHB	2	18	4	4
SHB	3	12	2	2
WHB		1	1	1
Total	**16**	**85**	**103**	**103**

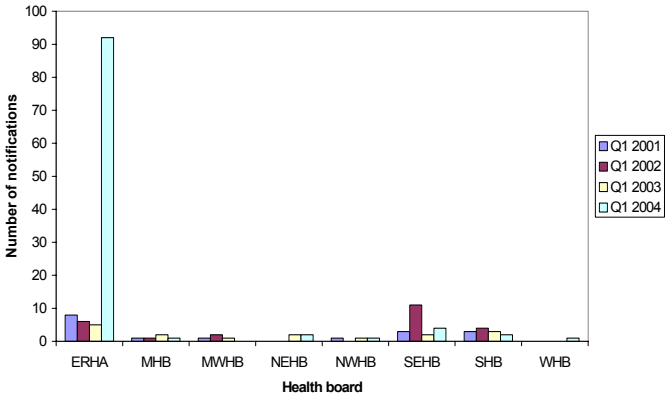

Figure 2. Number of notifications per health board in Q1 2001-2004

Age and sex

Age and sex distribution can be seen in figure 3

Case classification

No case classification was reported in 29.1% of cases, 63.1% were classified as **confirmed** hepatitis C, 1% were **possible** hepatitis C and the remaining 6.8% were reported as unknown*. (*Note – "possible" is not applicable as a case classification*).

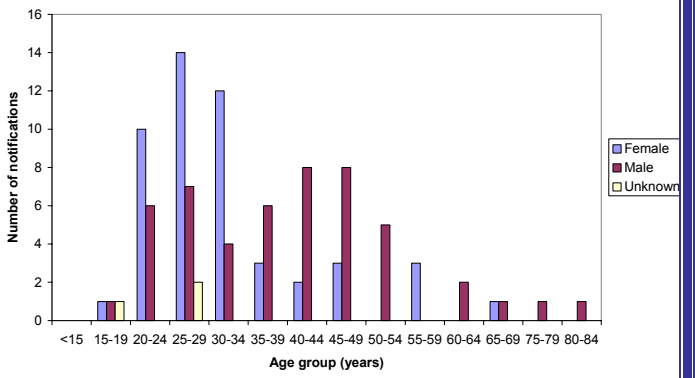

Figure 3. Notification in quarter 1 2004 by age and sex

Source of notification

Sixty one percent of cases were notified by a laboratory, 18% by a hospital clinician, 6% by a GP and 5% by a public health doctor. Information on the source of notification was missing in 10% of cases.

Discussion

Hepatitis C became a notifiable disease on the 1st January 2004. This, as well as the other amendments to the infectious disease Regulations, should improve the quality and comprehensiveness of data available on hepatitis C in Ireland. Enhanced surveillance is also needed to gather risk factor information in order to fully describe the epidemiology and allow for planning and evaluation of prevention strategies.

Acknowledgements

NDSC would like to thank all those who provided data for this report - departments of public health, laboratories and clinicians.

Report by: Aline Brennan and Dr Lelia Thornton

***Case definition for hepatitis C**

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