

# Hepatitis C infections in people who inject drugs continue to fall

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## **New report highlights continued progress in eliminating hepatitis C in England.**

The latest data from the UK Health Security Agency shows that chronic hepatitis C cases have fallen significantly. Around 50,200 adults were estimated to be living with chronic hepatitis C in England in 2024, a fall of 61.1% from 129,000 in 2015.

This decline in cases reflects the impact of expanded testing initiatives and sustained access to curative direct-acting antiviral (DAA) treatment.

Only 5.2% of people who inject drugs (the group at highest risk of acquiring hepatitis C) had the infection in 2024, compared with 28.6% in 2015.

Hepatitis C is a virus that can infect the liver. If left untreated, over the course of many years it can sometimes cause serious and potentially life-threatening liver damage. It is usually spread by blood-to-blood contact. People who inject drugs now or in the past are particularly at risk. This is especially the case if they have shared or re-used needles and syringes.

Dr Monica Desai, Head of the Hepatitis Section at the UK Health Security Agency, said:

We are making significant progress towards eliminating hepatitis C. The sharp fall in cases since 2015 shows the impact of expanded testing and sustained access to modern curative treatments and the commitment of health services and community partners across England. While the number of people living with the virus continues to decline, it remains vital that those most at risk are offered testing, can access life-saving treatments, and receive the support needed to prevent new infections.

Rachel Halford, CEO of The Hepatitis C Trust, said:

It is encouraging to see the continued commitment of the Government, the NHS, and partners driving a sustained reduction in cases of this treatable virus. This work is a shining example to the rest of our health system, and health systems around the world, that when you meaningfully involve all key stakeholders, including people with lived experience, in the design and delivery of services, you can achieve incredible things.

While elimination is within reach, we cannot afford to ease our commitment – we are not there yet. We must continue testing and identifying those who remain undiagnosed, while also developing clear plans to sustain this progress and ensure it is maintained in the future.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. An estimated 1 in 3 people who injected drugs report that needle and syringe provisions do not meet their injecting needs. Reaching those who may be unaware of their status and strengthening harm reduction services is crucial to continue preventing

new and re-infections.

Hepatitis C testing is free. GPs, sexual health clinics, genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, or drug treatment services also offer testing for the infection. You can also do a finger-prick test at home to find out if you have hepatitis C.

People can also take the Hepatitis C Trust Quiz to find out if they may be at risk of hepatitis C.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hepatitis-c-infections-in-people-who-inject-drugs-continue-to-fall>