

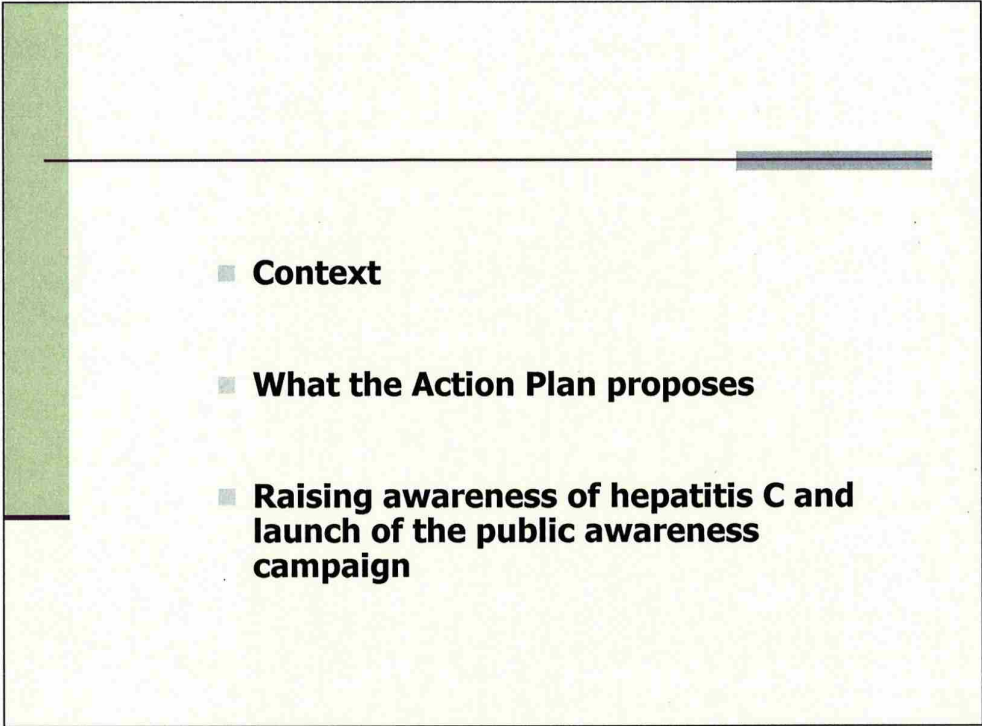
Hepatitis C Action Plan for England: launch of public awareness campaign

Sir Liam Donaldson
Chief Medical Officer

Thanks to Professor Howard Thomas and colleagues at St Mary's for hosting today's launch of the hepatitis C public awareness campaign.

It is apt in some ways that the launch takes place at St Mary's as Professor Thomas has played a significant role in advising the Department on the *Hepatitis C Strategy for England* and the subsequent Action Plan.

Today's launch marks the next and important phase in our national hepatitis C awareness campaign, which began with the ongoing professional awareness campaign when the *Hepatitis C Action Plan* was published at the end of June this year.

- 
- **Context**
 - **What the Action Plan proposes**
 - **Raising awareness of hepatitis C and launch of the public awareness campaign**

In my presentation today, I thought it would might be useful if:

-I put the Action Plan into the context of the my overall strategy to tackle infectious diseases called *Getting Ahead of the Curve*

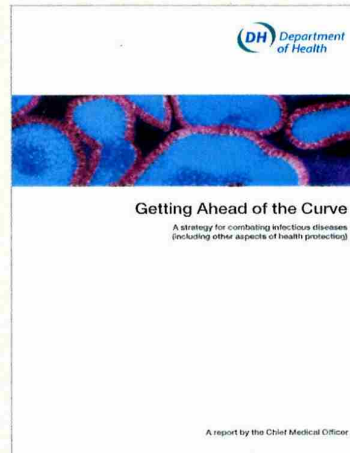
- I describe framework of ongoing and new actions contained in the *Hepatitis C Action Plan for England* to tackle this infectious disease problem

- I then intend to speak about the Department's hepatitis C awareness campaign, the public element of which I'm launching ^{today} ~~national professional and public awareness is currently~~ doing in support of ~~implementing Action Plan, including the~~ hepatitis C professional and public awareness campaign.

Getting Ahead of the Curve

Hepatitis C

- highlighted in my infectious disease strategy, *Getting Ahead of the Curve*
- Hepatitis C is considered global public health problem. 170 million chronic carriers of this blood-borne virus world-wide
- Can cause cirrhosis and primary liver cancer
- 200,000 people in England (0.4% of the general population) may be chronic carriers, majority unaware of their infection
- Effective NICE-recommended antiviral drug therapy is available.



To put what the Department has been doing with regard to hepatitis C into context – let's start with the publication in 2002 of *Getting Ahead of the Curve*, my strategy for infectious diseases, the first of its kind in the world.

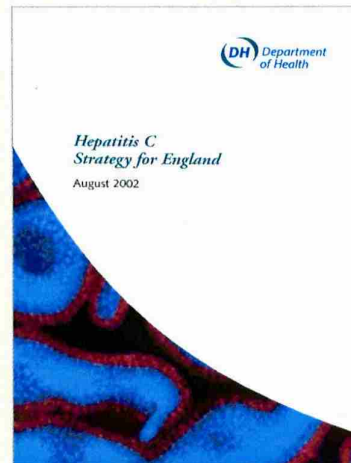
This document described the scope and nature of the threats posed by infectious diseases to the health of the population of England. The strategy also set out priorities for action, including hepatitis C, and proposed a co-ordinated and unified approach to health protection that led to the establishment of the Health Protection Agency.

This slide highlights the idea of importance of hepatitis C as a public health issue and this led to the Department publishing the *Hepatitis C Strategy for England* for consultation in August 2002.

200,000

Hepatitis C Strategy for England

- **Prevent new infections**
- **Identify those already infected**
- **Refer for specialist assessment & treatment (where indicated) to prevent progression to serious liver disease**



The *Hepatitis C Strategy for England* was produced with the assistance of a multi-disciplinary expert steering group, chaired by Professor Howard Thomas who also chairs the Department's Advisory Group on Hepatitis.

The steering group comprised health professionals, academics and representatives from the voluntary and community sectors, including a patient representative.

The strategy's main aims are arguably rather obvious but no less important or compelling for being so – that is to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C.

International outlook: how do we compare?

Estimated prevalence and number of people with antibody to hepatitis C

	Hepatitis C antibody prevalence (%)	Population in millions	Numbers of people
England	0.5	50	250,000
France	1.2	57	684,000
Italy	3.0	57	1,710,000

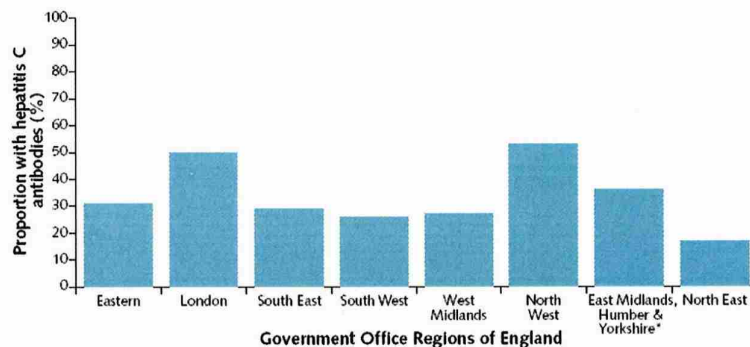
This table illustrates that England is a relatively low prevalence country for hepatitis C.

However, the risks of complacency are high and the absolute numbers with chronic infection- about 200,000, the majority of whom are undiagnosed, emphasise the importance of improved prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

The 200,000 is different to the other slide which says 250,000 because the former slide includes chronic carriers – this table shows prevalence based on antibody presence – about 20% of people clear the virus from their system.

Spontaneously

Current and former injecting drug users in England: hepatitis C prevalence by region (data for 2001 and 2002 combined)



* Data for these two regions have been combined due to small sample sizes

Data source: Unlinked anonymous prevalence monitoring programme survey of around 3,000 injectors in contact with drug treatment and support agencies each year

- higher levels in inner city areas (prob reflecting a higher concentration of injecting drug users).
- Rates highest - London and NWest

Transmission of hepatitis C, England 1992-2002

Risk factor (where reported)	Number of laboratory reports of hepatitis C infection	Percentage
Injecting drug use	10,057	91.1
Blood transfusion	279	2.5
Blood product recipient	249	2.3
Sexual exposure	195	1.8
Renal failure	108	0.9
Other known (i.e. organ/tissue transplant, surgical/medical, skin piercing, occupational)	90	0.8
Vertical (mother to baby) or family/ household	67	0.6
	11,045	100

Source: Health Protection Agency

Hepatitis C laboratory reports: England and Wales, by sex, 1992-2003*

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003 ¹
Male	160	297	570	1191	1784	2184	3011	3772	3406	3311	4035	4333
Female	74	129	249	414	688	793	1328	1744	1641	1487	1746	2040
Not known	7	9	20	41	55	61	140	209	186	159	117	139
TOTAL	241	435	839	1646	2527	3038	4479	5725	5233	4957	5898	6512

Last updated September 2004

* Provisional data

Source: Health Protection Agency

Hepatitis C virus was discovered in 1989 by investigators at Chiron Inc.

Trends show a rise in laboratory reports since data was first collected. This is to be expected because of better awareness and increased testing.

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis means swelling or inflammation of the liver. The most common causes of hepatitis are viral infections. Hepatitis C infection (also known as Hep C or HCV) is one such virus that can cause long-lasting infection and can lead to liver disease.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C infection affects different people in different ways. Reported symptoms include fatigue, weight loss, nausea, 'flu like symptoms, problems concentrating, abdominal pain and jaundice. It is estimated that around 15-20% of infected people clear their infections naturally within the first 6 months of infection. For the remainder, hepatitis C is a chronic infection that can span several decades and can be life-long.

How long can you have the infection before developing symptoms?

In the 80-85% of individuals who fail to clear their infections naturally, the outcome of infection is extremely variable. Many people never develop any signs or symptoms of liver disease in their lifetime and consequently may not even know that they have been infected. Other people go on to develop serious liver disease. Symptoms do not often develop until the liver has been quite extensively damaged. Alcohol consumption, acquiring the infection at an older age, and being male, have all been shown to be associated with more progressive disease.

How can hepatitis C be prevented or treated?

Prevention is centred on stopping the blood from infected individuals from coming into contact with others. Injecting drug users are at high risk of infection and when injecting cannot be avoided, sterile injecting equipment should always be used; injecting equipment should never be shared. Similarly, individuals who undergo body piercing should ensure that disposable sterile needles are used. In the home, sharing of personal items, like toothbrushes and razors, should be avoided and all wounds and cuts should be cleaned and covered with waterproof dressings; blood spills should be cleaned-up with undiluted bleach. In a health care setting, universal precautions should be adhered to; all blood, body fluids and body tissues should be treated as potentially infectious at all times.

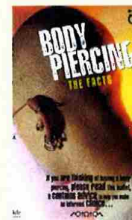
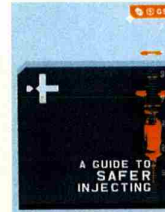
X | The treatment of choice for individuals with chronic hepatitis C infection is a combination of two drugs: ^{interferon} interferon and ribavirin. This combination therapy is successful in clearing virus from the blood of around 40% of those treated. However, not everybody is suitable for treatment or can tolerate it. Factors such as age, sex, duration of infection, the strain of the virus, and the degree of existing liver damage determine the effectiveness of treatment. New ~~more~~ effective treatments are likely to become available in the ~~near~~ future.

Overall
55%
can be ~ high ~
80%

Hepatitis C Strategy for England

Main proposals:

- raise professional and public awareness of hepatitis C;
- intensify efforts to prevent new cases of hepatitis C infection;
- increase diagnosis of people at current or past risk of infection;
- assess and offer treatment (where indicated) to people who have hepatitis C infection;
- improve the evidence base through epidemiological surveillance and research.



The strategy's main proposals followed on from the aims under these main headings. I'll just run through them.....[paraphrase what's on the slide].

I am pleased to say that the consultation exercise in 2002 demonstrated broad support for the strategy aims and proposals. This then led to the development of an action plan to implement the proposals.

Hepatitis C Action Plan for England

- **Action 1:** Surveillance and research
- **Action 2:** Increasing awareness and reducing undiagnosed infections
- **Action 3:** High-quality health & social care services
- **Action 4:** Prevention

I published the *Hepatitis C Action Plan for England* on 29 June this year.

The Action Plan sets out a framework of ongoing and new actions for the Department, the NHS and other key stakeholders under four key areas as outlined on the slide. Each of these action areas is to address a key issue

Action 1: Surveillance and research

Improve surveillance and research so that trends in hepatitis C infection and the effectiveness of prevention measures can be monitored

Action 2: Increasing awareness and reducing undiagnosed Infections

An estimated five out of every six people with chronic hepatitis C are unaware of their infection. This requires action to increase awareness of hepatitis C amongst health professionals, the public and high-risk groups and the promotion of testing in a range of settings.

Action 3: High-quality health & social care services

High-quality services for the assessment and treatment of all patients with hepatitis C need to be co-ordinated and accessible across the country.

Action 4: Prevention

There is evidence of ongoing transmission of hepatitis C, particularly among injecting drug users. Prevention efforts need to be intensified to reduce the spread of hepatitis C in at-risk populations.

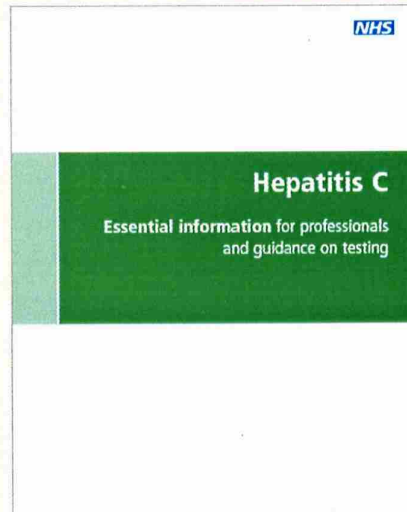
Hepatitis C awareness campaign for health care professionals

- Professional awareness campaign launched with *Hepatitis C Action Plan for England*

- FaCe It "brand"

FACE IT
Hepatitis C Awareness

- July 2004 - every GP and Practice Nurse in England received essential information pack



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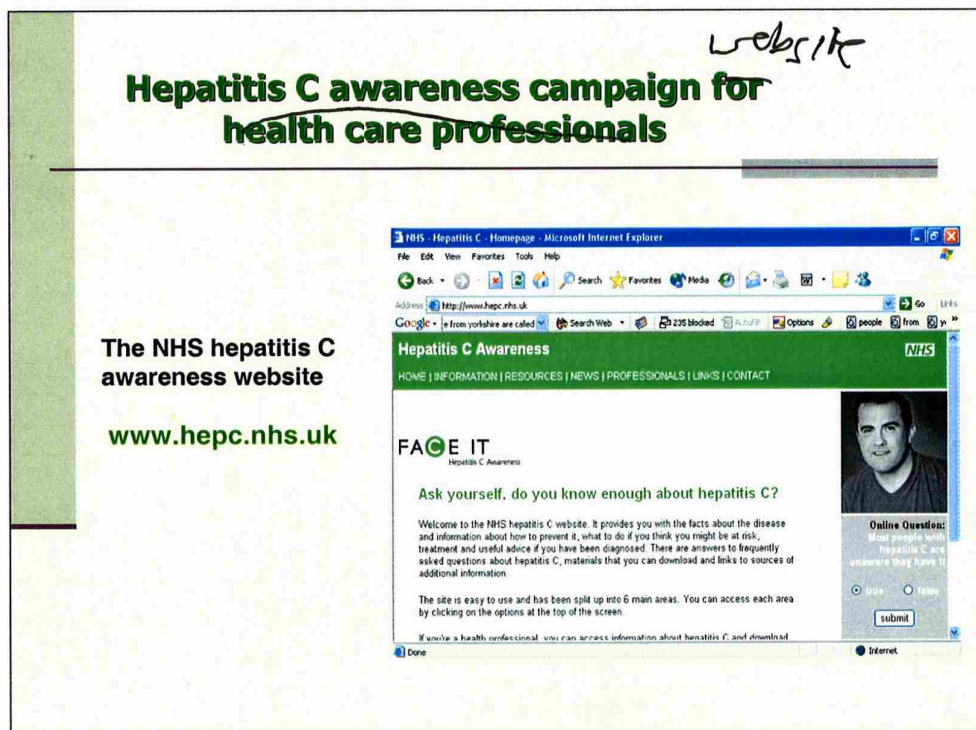


Implementation of the Action Plan is being be undepinned by a health care professional awareness campaign, and the public awareness campaign that I'm launching today.

There was strong support for such campaigns in the consultation exercise and market research has indicated the need for awareness-raising too.

The Department has been working with health care professionals to raise awareness of hepatitis C since 2002, when information packs were distributed to all GPs and practice nurses in England and a range of other health care professionals. There were also 8 regional hepatitis C awareness seminars for primary care professionals during 2002 and 2003.

Publication of the Action Plan marked the formal launch of hepatitis C professional awareness campaign, which started with distribution of a new information pack to GPs, practice nurses and other health professionals, which guidance on hepatitis C testing. The professional campaign will continue with articles and features in the professional press and stands at professional conferences.

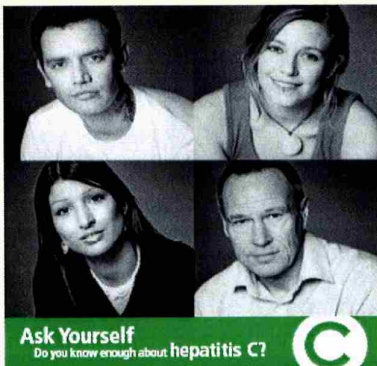


We have also launched a new NHS hepatitis C Awareness website for health care professionals and the public at www.hepc.nhs.uk, which I understand already has a good “hit” rate – ~~around 4,500~~ hits since its launch on 29 June.

*over
8000
visits*

We are going to be promoting it more widely to the public with the launch of the public awareness campaign.

Hepatitis C Awareness: launch of public campaign



Ask Yourself
Do you know enough about hepatitis C?



Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus that damages the liver. It is often
spread by contact with infected blood or a person's blood or plasma.
Hepatitis C is a worldwide health problem. It is not a risk.
• Use of drugs, needles or other equipment for injecting drugs may be used.
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IF YOU HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT HEPATITIS C VISIT [WWW.HEPC.NHS.UK](http://www.hepc.nhs.uk)

FACE IT
Facing It, Curing It



FACE IT
Hepatitis C Awareness

Hepatitis C Information Line
0800 451451

NHS Hepatitis C Awareness
Website
www.hepc.nhs.uk

Hepatitis C Awareness: launch of public Campaign

- Campaign will be non-alarmist, non-stigmatising and targeted where appropriate, and sustained.
- Supported by a new pilot national *Hepatitis C telephone information line* 0800 451451 – open 10am-10pm, 7days a week.
- Supported by NHS hepatitis C awareness website - www.hepc.nhs.uk - which will be further developed and improved.
- Will use a range of methods for raising awareness e.g. features in national press and consumer magazines using case studies, where appropriate; advertorials; postcard advertising and patient leaflets and posters.

We have left a gap between launching the professional and public awareness campaigns so that health care professionals have had time to get ready to respond to increased interest about hepatitis C. The campaign will not be a one-off hit. It will be sustained over several years in the first instance.

We are launching today a new national (England) Hepatitis C telephone information line. Its remit will be to provide information, advice and referrals to callers concerned about hepatitis C.

It will be a route for confidential, personal and sensitive one-to-one communication and will complement the existing NHS hepatitis C awareness website and the more general service offered by *NHS Direct*.

It will be run by the providers of the national sexual health, drugs and alcohol telephone lines, *The Essentia Group*.

Facing up to hepatitis C

- **Hepatitis C is preventable.**
- **Effective treatment is available.**
- **The public need to be aware of the risks of infection and how they may be avoided. Health care professionals have a key role.**
- **Individuals who may have been at risk need to “face it” and seek advice from health care professionals about hepatitis C testing.**
- **Health care professionals need to refer those who test positive for specialist assessment.**

Summary

- Hepatitis C is an important public health problem requiring intensified action as proposed in *Getting Ahead of the Curve*
- *Hepatitis C Action Plan for England* sets out a framework of actions for the key stakeholders to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C
- Launch of the public awareness campaign is an important phase of the Action Plan's implementation.

Finally to sum up...The Government recognises the public health importance of hepatitis C and has produced a strategy and action plan to address this. [Then paraphrase slide....]

Thank you.