

Scaling up screening for viral hepatitis in Europe

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A new toolkit on screening for chronic viral hepatitis seeks to raise awareness, improve knowledge and motivate public health professionals in Europe to take action. Knowledge and understanding of what works in screening for chronic hepatitis B/C has now been translated into practical and relevant tools, including videos and animations, to enable others to replicate successful screening programmes among at risk populations in their area.

If left untreated, [viral hepatitis](#) can cause serious liver disease including cancer. People with a chronic infection often have no symptoms and may have been infected decades earlier, as infants, children or young adults. Chronic infections are therefore often hidden both from individuals and clinicians which is why screening is important – to identify asymptomatic people who are infected, as yet undiagnosed and could benefit from the effective treatment that is now available.

"Chronic viral hepatitis-related mortality in the EU is expected to rapidly grow if nothing is done." says Charles Gore, Chief Executive of the World Hepatitis Alliance. "Yet, screening amongst risk groups, including people born in endemic countries, has proven effective in identifying viral hepatitis patients, enabling them to receive treatment in time and avoid complications due to liver diseases including cancer. The HEPscreen Toolkit presents practical and scientific items to help scale up screening and to tackle this urgent public health challenge."

An important but often neglected group in Europe are people born in

countries where hepatitis B and C are common. The Toolkit has been developed by the HEPscreen consortium with co-funding from the EU Health Programme. Through varied research methods including pilot investigations HEPscreen assessed good practices in screening and patient management for chronic viral hepatitis in Europe with a focus on migrant populations.

"The HEPscreen Toolkit provides a very useful resource for EU Member States in tackling hepatitis among migrant groups" says Marc Sprenger, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). "It is exciting to see the three years of epidemiological, health system and implementation research translated into useful tools that enable others to repeat good practices and avoid unsuccessful approaches in order to make an impact on people's health."

The timing of the launch of Toolkit on www.hepscreen.eu coincides with increasing global policy interest. The World Health Assembly approved a resolution to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of viral hepatitis in May 2014. But there is a lot of work yet to be done. The Global Burden of Disease study (2010) ranked viral hepatitis 9th in the list of causes of mortality, with a larger disease burden in Europe than HIV. Yet, viral hepatitis receives much less public health, policy or political attention in comparison to HIV. Publication this month of a feature in the Winter edition of Euro Health highlights to the [public health policy](#) and planning community the facts about the current need for [screening](#) in Europe, the suggested actions to enable scaling up and how the Toolkit can help. It is hoped that with this Toolkit, Europe is better equipped to effectively respond to this [public health](#) challenge before the peak in mortality predicted in just a few decades.

Provided by HorizonHealth

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