

Awareness of hepatitis C transmission risks low as new campaign launched

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Around a third of people don't know how hepatitis C can be passed from person to person, according to new research commissioned by the Department of Health.

Nearly one in four of the 1,500 adults surveyed in an ICM Poll, didn't know that hepatitis C can be passed on by sharing needles when injecting drugs. Around 4 in 10 were unaware that the blood borne virus, which can cause chronic infection and lead to serious liver damage, can also be caught by using unsterile equipment when getting a tattoo, piercing or acupuncture.

In contrast, one in eight people thought hepatitis C can be transmitted by kissing. A third mistakenly believed that a vaccine is available to protect against the blood borne virus.

The findings were published alongside the launch of a major government hepatitis C awareness campaign. The initiative aims to inform the estimated 100,000 people in England who are unaware they have the virus and to stop others getting it.

Radio and press adverts aim to raise awareness of the risk of contracting hepatitis C when injecting drugs or getting tattoos with unsterile equipment. Online activity includes a series of short video case studies of people's life experiences with the virus on the NHS Choices website and a web-based screening test for people who think they may have come into contact with the virus. An NHS Hepatitis C Information line is also available on 0800 181 4114.

Launching the campaign Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson said:

"Around 100,000 people in England are estimated to be unaware that they have hepatitis C. It can take years or even decades for symptoms to appear, if at all, and if left untreated can lead to liver damage and premature death. Fortunately, effective treatment is available, so it's vital that people who may have been at risk of infection seek medical advice and get tested."

Charles Gore, Chief Executive of the Hepatitis C Trust said:

"Twenty years down the line, it's worrying to see the public still believe so many myths around hepatitis C. Education is absolutely essential to eradicating this problem. We are pleased to see the Department of Health campaigning on this issue, but it's now time for both the public and health professionals to take action. We'd urge anyone who feels they might be at risk to get tested, and health professionals to be vigilant to diagnosing patients."

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Related Links

[NHS Choices hepatitis C awareness raising campaign website \(opens in new window\)](#)