

[News story: Hepatitis C in the North West report released](#)

Public Health England (PHE) [North West's hepatitis C: 2016 report](#), published today (Monday 26 March 2018), reveals that the number of people infected with hepatitis C has remained stable since 2014. The most recent estimates suggest at least 40,000 people across the North West acquired hepatitis C infection, and of those 27,000 have developed chronic infection.

The report also shows that the number of infected people who have not been diagnosed remains high with an estimated 16,000 out of 40,000 (40%). Many people may be unaware because they have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, but they could be at risk of liver damage as well as passing on the infection to others.

Data shows that the highest burden of disease is in the Greater Manchester area, while Lancashire and Liverpool also have high numbers of people living with hepatitis C.

Those most at risk of contracting hepatitis C infection in the North West are people who inject drugs or have injected drugs in the past – especially if they have shared injecting equipment. They are at increased risk even if they injected only once or twice in the past.

A nationwide survey carried out in 2013 revealed that, in the North West, up to 68% of individuals who inject drugs have hepatitis C infection. People in prison settings also have an increased risk of hepatitis C infection,

Evdokia Dardamissis from PHE North West said:

Hepatitis C remains a major public health concern and one that we are actively addressing in partnership with the NHS and drug services.

The rate of hepatitis C-related mortality and hospital admissions for hepatitis C-related end stage liver disease in the North West is almost twice as high as the rate in England.

However, we are committed to working closely with multiple stakeholders to improve surveillance, diagnosis and care pathways. By increasing public awareness, those people most at risk can take the necessary preventative measures to protect themselves, and those who are already infected can be brought into highly effective treatment programmes.

We encourage anyone who believes that they may be at risk to ask their GP or drug services to be tested for the virus. This is an infection which can be cured in most people. Simple measures such as using sterile injecting equipment and not sharing personal items

like toothbrushes and razors will minimise chances of being exposed to hepatitis C.

Statement to Parliament: Maritime and Coastguard Agency business plan 2018 to 2019

I am proud to announce the publication of the [Maritime and Coastguard Agency's \(MCA\) business plan for 2018 to 2019](#). MCA does vital work to save lives at sea, regulate ship standards and protect the marine environment. The Agency affects not just those working on the coast or at sea, it upholds the legacy of our great maritime nation.

The business plan sets out:

1. the services that the agency will deliver and any significant changes it plans to make
2. the resources the agency requires
3. the key performance indicators, by which its performance will be assessed

This plan allows service users and members of the public to assess how the agency is performing in operating its key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plan will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both houses.

Press release: Women and girls set to benefit from £15 million Tampon Tax Fund

Thousands of women from across the UK will benefit from £15 million from the latest round of the Tampon Tax Fund, the Minister for Sport and Civil Society Tracey Crouch announced today.

Projects that tackle sexual violence, address social exclusion among BAME

women and improve mental health and wellbeing will receive funding over the next two years. The money will also be used to make grants to smaller organisations so they can deploy services that support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged women and girls in the country.

Tracey Crouch, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, said:

The money generated from sanitary products is being invested in good causes that tackle the serious issues that women of all ages face. It will be used to support vulnerable women and girls and help build a Britain fit for the future.

The ten projects receiving funding from this round of the Tampon Tax are:

[UK Community Foundations](#) £3,400,000 – The Tribewoman project will support vulnerable and excluded women by making onward grants to smaller charities across the UK

[Arhag Housing Association](#) £1,040,000 – The BME Women Hub project will alleviate poverty and social exclusion among women in England

[Brook Young People](#) £1,500,000 – The ‘Let’s Talk. Period.’ project will aim to address period poverty in England.

[Rape Crisis England & Wales](#) £1,400,000 – This digital transformation project is a new approach to tackling sexual violence delivered through member Rape Crisis Centres In England

[Women’s Aid Federation of England](#) £1,509,850 – The ‘Ask Me’ project will improve the community response to domestic abuse across the UK and includes onward grants opportunities

[Hestia Housing and Support](#) £1,000,000 – The ‘Tools for the Job’ pilot project aims to transform the way that employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland deal with domestic abuse, by improving their HR policies and delivering awareness raising for staff.

[The RCJ & Islington Citizens Advice Bureaux](#) £1,090,488 – The FLOWS project will provide online-tools to improve the capacity of front-line domestic-violence agencies in England to provide legal support to women and children

[Mind](#) £1,785,554 – This project will increase the provision of mental health peer support for women experiencing, and at risk of, mental health problems and includes onward grant programme in England and Wales

[St. Giles Trust](#) £1,077,158 – The ‘Footsteps’ project aims to improve service provision to women in the Criminal Justice System in England with mental health and complex support needs

[One Parent Families Scotland](#) £1,049,590 – This Scotland only project will offer a free support and counselling service for the most disadvantaged,

vulnerable and marginalised women most in need.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1) Over 70 charities are already receiving grants through previous rounds of the fund, with a total of £32m of funding having been announced since Autumn Statement 2015. This latest funding brings the total investment awarded from the Tampon Tax Fund to £47m.

2) The government is committed to continuing the fund until EU rules allow a zero rate of VAT to be applied to women's sanitary products. A decision will be made on the future of the Fund once this has been achieved. Current EU laws prohibits any Member State from applying a new zero rate of VAT. We therefore currently apply the lowest rate we can to these products (5%).

[Press release: Animal welfare enhanced by new code for meat chickens](#)

Updated: Updated code link

[A welfare code for meat chickens](#) has been updated today as part of a programme of reforms to safeguard and enhance the welfare of animals.

Strengthened statutory guidance is now in place for meat chicken keepers on how to meet the needs of their animals and improve their welfare.

This welfare code has been updated to reflect the very latest advice from vets and animal husbandry developments, as part of a programme of reforms to safeguard and enhance the welfare of animals, the Minister for animal welfare, Lord Gardiner announced today.

Minister for Animal welfare Lord Gardiner said:

We have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world and are going further in a number of areas, including by raising maximum sentences for animal cruelty to five years and introducing mandatory CCTV in abattoirs.

This code was carefully consulted on with industry experts, and uses the most recent scientific and veterinary advice to ensure this clear guidance provides the best advice to owners and keepers to help ensure and enhance the high welfare standards of their animals.

The updated meat chicken code incorporates guidance to reflect new regulations in force since publication of the previous code, including:

- Specific provisions on staff training
- Stocking density, and
- Follow-up at slaughterhouses

Máire Burnett, Technical Director from British Poultry Council, said:

We welcome the new statutory code of practice for welfare of meat chickens and meat breeding chickens that reflects the high welfare standards followed by British poultry meat farmers, breeders and veterinarians. The new code is intended to help all those who care for meat chickens and meat breeding chickens to practise good biosecurity and maintain welfare standards required to comply with legislation.

The British poultry meat sector is committed to continuous improvement and will carry on following welfare science as it progresses. We look forward to continue working with Defra to further enhance welfare codes for turkeys and ducks to reflect industry best practice.

The updated code also provides more detailed guidance on biosecurity, leg health and enriching the environment for chickens.

The code will be used by enforcement bodies including [Animal and Plant Health Agency](#) inspectors and local authorities when investigating allegations of poor welfare to look at whether animal welfare standards are being met.

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1. 26 March 2018 Updated code link
2. 26 March 2018 First published.