

News story: Around 80% of people don't realise hepatitis C can lead to cancer

Public Health England (PHE) is urging people to get free testing for hepatitis C virus (HCV) after new data shows a lack of awareness of the disease and the factors that can put people at risk of infection.

A study commissioned by The Hepatitis C Trust showed 80% of people were aware of HCV, however, less than 40% knew it infects the liver, and less than 30% knew the virus is curable.

Revolutionary treatments can now cure HCV in the vast majority of cases.

Around 200,000 people in the UK are thought to be living with chronic HCV, yet challenges in awareness remain a barrier to timely diagnosis and treatment.

HCV can cause severe liver damage and can lead to death if left untreated. It is spread through blood-to-blood contact.

It often doesn't have any specific symptoms until significant liver damage is caused. Some people with HCV may experience flu-like symptoms, tiredness and abdominal pain, which can easily be ignored or mistaken for other conditions.

In England, around one-third of those with a long-term infection with HCV are believed to be over the age of 50 and many will have acquired the infection years, or even decades, earlier.

As World Hepatitis Day approaches, PHE is partnering with The Hepatitis C Trust to increase efforts to ensure people living with HCV unknowingly are diagnosed and treated. This will contribute to achieving the World Health Organization's ambition of eliminating hepatitis C as a major public health threat by 2030 at the latest.

Dr Helen Harris, Clinical Scientist, Public Health England, said:

The results of this survey highlight the very low levels of awareness of hepatitis C and the factors that can put people at risk of infection. We strongly encourage anyone who may have been at risk of hepatitis C infection to get tested, whether or not they have any symptoms.

It is crucial that people are tested and diagnosed in order that they can access treatment early to clear the virus. Increased levels of testing and diagnosis are essential if we are to reach our goal of eliminating hepatitis C as a major public health threat in the UK by 2030, at the latest.

You should get tested if you:

- received a blood transfusion before September 1991, or a blood product before 1986 in the UK
- shared needles or other equipment to inject drugs, even if it was just once or many years ago
- had medical or dental treatment abroad in unsterile conditions
- had a tattoo, piercing, acupuncture, electrolysis, or semi-permanent make up using equipment that may have been unsterilised
- had unprotected sex with someone who has or might have hepatitis C
- shared a razor or toothbrush with someone who has, or might have hepatitis C

PHE strongly encourages anyone who may have been at risk of HCV to get tested, whether or not they have any symptoms. Free and simple testing is available from local GPs, sexual health clinics, genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics or drug treatment services.

[Official Statistics: Carbon Intensity Indicators for Northern Ireland 2018](#)

Emissions intensity is concerned with capturing the amount of CO2 equivalent generated per unit of output or per capita, rather than measuring absolute emissions levels. For example, power sector emissions per unit of electricity generated or total NI emissions per head of population. The value of taking such an approach is that, whilst overall emissions might be seen to be increasing for a particular sector in line with an expanding economy, the carbon intensity might actually be decreasing which could still be viewed as a positive outcome. The carbon intensity indicators are therefore another way of measuring the progress being made in NI towards reducing GHG emissions in terms of intensity as opposed to absolute emissions.

[National Statistics: Monthly sea fisheries statistics May 2018](#)

The monthly landings statistics will be released at 9.30am on the 4th Friday of each month, or the next working day if this is a bank holiday.

[News story: Plastic bag sales in 'big seven' supermarkets down 86% since 5p charge](#)

Plastic bag sales in England's 'big seven' supermarkets have dropped by 86% since the Government introduced its 5p plastic bag charge in 2015, helping to tackle the devastating impact of plastic waste on our environment.

[New figures](#) reveal customers of the country's biggest supermarkets bought nearly a quarter fewer plastic bags last year compared to 2016/17 – a decrease of nearly 300 million bags.

This is equivalent to just 19 bags per person in England, compared to 140 bags since the government introduced a 5p charge in 2015 – a dramatic reduction of 86%.

Welcoming today's figures, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

These figures demonstrate the collective impact we can make to help the environment by making simple changes to our daily routines. We want businesses to continue to look at what they can do to help improve our environment to leave it in a better state than we found it.

It is only by working together we will reverse the rising tide of plastic waste finding its way into our rivers, seas and oceans and the catastrophic impact this is having on our marine environment.

Plastic bags have a significant impact on the environment. Government scientists believe plastic in the sea is set to treble in a decade unless marine litter is curbed – with one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals dying every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

A recent study by Cefas revealed since the 5p charge on plastic bags was introduced, which has taken over 9 billion plastic bags out of circulation, there has been an estimated 50% reduction in plastic bag marine litter.

Thomas Maes, Marine Litter Scientist at Cefas said:

Every plastic bag not purchased is one which will not end up in our sea, damaging habitats or harming marine life. Since efforts from across Europe came into effect, including the UK's 5p charge, we have observed a sharp decline in the percentage of plastic bags captured by fishing nets on our trawl surveys of the seafloor

around the UK as compared to 2010.

It is encouraging to see the efforts to reduce plastic bag usage by all of society, whether the public, industry, NGOs or government. These figures show that by working together we can tackle the marine litter problem by reducing, reusing and recycling.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting our seas, oceans and marine life. The Government has recently announced a range of measures to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste including a [world-leading ban on microbeads](#) and proposals to extend the 5p plastic bag charge and explore plastic free aisles in supermarkets.

Earlier this year we announced our intention to [ban the sale of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds](#), plans for a [deposit return scheme](#) to increase recycling rates of drinks bottles and cans, and launched a [call for evidence](#) on using the tax system or charges to address single-use plastic waste.

Today's figures also reveal that for 2017/18 5p plastic bag sales contributed nearly £60m toward charities and other good causes.

Background

1. The seven biggest retailers in the UK are Asda, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury, The Co-operative Group, Tesco and Waitrose.
2. The figure that plastic in the sea is set to treble is taken from the [Future of the Sea](#) report.
3. The statistic that there has been an estimated 50% reduction in plastic bag marine litter since the 5p plastic bag charge was introduced in 2015 is from Cefas's [Below the Surface](#) report.

[Press release: Report on state of air quality in England highlights urgent action needed on ammonia emissions](#)

A rise in ammonia emissions is having a damaging effect on wildlife and habitats, according to the Environment Agency's first ever report on England's air quality, published today. [The report](#) shows that, unlike other main air pollutants, emissions of ammonia have increased since 2013.

Ammonia deposition can overload land and water with nitrogen; it acidifies soils, natural habitats, and freshwaters. These effects reduce biodiversity in sensitive habitats creating a knock-on effect for our wildflower species,

aquatic and insect life. The report shows of England's nitrogen-sensitive habitats, 95% are affected by nitrogen deposition.

The vast majority of UK ammonia emissions, 88%, come from the agricultural sector as a result of such activities as fertiliser use and slurry storage. Higher concentrations and deposition levels are associated with areas of intensive livestock production, especially dairy and beef.

The Environment Agency is today calling on farmers to take urgent action by changing land management practices and becoming more nitrogen efficient. A new Code of Good Agricultural Practice designed in collaboration with farming organisations, DEFRA and the Environment Agency is being published today to help farmers improve their land management and reduce ammonia emissions.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

Urgent action is needed if we are going to tackle the hidden blight of ammonia emissions. These emissions are having a detrimental impact on the environment, precious habitats and wildlife. As custodians of the land, farmers must take the lead by changing their land management practices.

More broadly, poor air quality is bad for the environment but also people's health and wellbeing. This report also shows the need to tackle the high levels of nitrogen dioxide, ozone, and particulate matter that persist in certain areas. Improvement to air quality is going to require action from nations, government at a national and local level, organisations, and communities – but just as importantly – individuals.

Huge improvements in air quality since the 1970s

The report shows the progress made in reducing air pollution over recent decades. Since 1970 in the UK:

- Nitrogen oxide (NO_x) emissions have reduced by 72%
- Particulate matter (PM₁₀) has reduced by 73%.
- Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) has reduced by 97%
- Non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC) have reduced by 66%

These emissions come from a range of sources including vehicles emissions and industrial processes. By working with the industries, the Environment Agency has helped to contribute to these reductions and will continue to do so through future regulation.

However, while legal limits are being met for the majority of pollutants, high levels of nitrogen dioxide, ozone and particulate matter remain in many urban areas with high concentrations around homes and schools, and are consequently a major public health concern. Furthermore, under current projections, emission reduction targets for 2030 will not be met for ammonia,

NO_x, NMVOCs, SO₂ and PM_{2.5} without further action. Particulate matter can have impacts on health even below current legal thresholds.

The Government has moved to address these issues by publishing its Clean Air Strategy. Clean Air is the first of the ten major goals set in the 25 Year Environment Plan, which contains important commitments aimed at curbing emissions from combustion plants and generators, ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040, and improving industrial emissions further by building on existing good practice and the successful regulatory framework. The Clean Air Strategy is currently out for public consultation until mid- August. To comment please go to the [Clean Air Strategy Consultation](#)