

It is always time to test: Spring European Testing Week



At present, reaching and testing those at risk of infection with HIV, hepatitis HBV (HBV) or hepatitis C (HCV) is still a public health challenge across Europe. Data show that every second person living with HIV in the EU/EEA is diagnosed late in the course of their infection. Similarly, a large proportion of the estimated nine million Europeans living with chronic hepatitis B or C are unaware that they are infected. In its recent evidence-based public health guidance on HIV, hepatitis B and C testing, ECDC advocates for integrated testing for the three viruses given that they have common modes of transmission, significant overlaps in affected population groups and high levels of co-infection.

“Testing is an entry point to treatment and care. Effective treatment of HIV or viral hepatitis either eliminates or suppresses the viruses”, explains ECDC Director Andrea Ammon, “this means treatment improves the health of those tested positive and prevents further transmission. That is why we support the efforts of European Testing Week.”

This year, European Testing Week tries to set a focus on scaling up testing efforts in prison settings. Ammon adds:

“Europe needs a stronger focus on working closely with vulnerable populations. This will improve efforts to identify those who are infected but not diagnosed and link them to appropriate healthcare services.”

Interrupting transmission with test-and-treat approach

Compared to the general public, people in prison have a higher burden of communicable diseases such as HBV, HCV, HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis. Data show that among people with a positive

diagnostic test in prison, sizeable proportions were unaware of their status (53% of those tested positive for hepatitis B, 12% of those with hepatitis C and 3% of those who were HIV positive were unaware of their infection).

The two ECDC and EMCDDA public health guidance documents on active case finding and prevention of blood-borne viruses (BBV) such as HIV and hepatitis B or C in prison settings promote the active offer for BBV testing to all people in prison upon admission and throughout the time in prison. Evidence shows that pro-active provision of BBV testing leads to a higher uptake of testing offers and health promotion as well as peer education have shown to increase HIV testing uptake.

[European Testing Week](#) runs from 17 to 24 May 2019 and organisations can sign up on the website.