

On-site hepatitis B/C screening and point-of-care HCV-RNA confirmation in an overcrowded Greek prison

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Background: Incarcerated populations carry a disproportionate burden of viral hepatitis, yet prison-based data from Greece remain scarce. We assessed hepatitis B and C screening outcomes and the HCV care cascade during an on-site intervention in an overcrowded Greek prison in Patra.

Methods: A cross-sectional screening and service-delivery project was conducted at Patras Prison, Greece, between 16 and 24 March 2026. On 16 March, occupancy was 651/446 (146.0%). Voluntary screening was offered to incarcerated men after written informed consent. Participants received rapid HBsAg and anti-HCV testing and completed structured questionnaires on demographics, substance use and HCV history. Anti-HCV-positive individuals were subsequently offered point-of-care Xpert HCV Viral Load (VL) fingerstick (fs) testing shortly after detection and, if VL-positive, blood tests for linkage to HCV treatment.

Results: Overall, 402 incarcerated men were screened, corresponding to 61.8% of the 16 March prison census. Median age was 41 years (25th–75th percentile: 33–50); 230/401 (57.4%) reported Greek nationality, and 219/399 (54.9%) were detained for drug-related offences. Lifetime injecting drug use was reported by 122/401 (30.4%); among ever-injectors, 53/122 (43.4%) reported lifetime sharing of used syringes. HBsAg was positive in 5/402 (1.2%). Anti-HCV was positive in 98/402 (24.4%); 82/98 (83.7%) already knew their HCV status. HCV VL fs testing was completed in 81/98 (82.7%) anti-HCV-positive participants, of whom 37/81 (45.7%) were RNA-positive. Confirmed active HCV viraemia among all screened participants was at least 37/402 (9.2%), as 17 anti-HCV-positive participants did not undergo RNA testing. Among RNA-positive participants with recorded follow-up, 28/36 (77.8%) completed baseline laboratory assessment.

Conclusion: This short, on-site intervention in an overcrowded Greek prison identified a substantial HCV burden and, to our knowledge, represents the first reported use of prison-based point-of-care GeneXpert HCV-RNA confirmation in Greece. Scaling up prison-based test-and-treat pathways across Greek prisons should prioritize rapid RNA confirmation, same-site baseline laboratory assessment, and continuity planning around transfer or release. To our knowledge, this is the first reported use of on-site POC Xpert-based HCV VL testing within a prison-based hepatitis screening intervention in Greece.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This project has been made possible with the provision of a financial grant from Gilead Sciences Europe Ltd. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.