

SENTINEL SURVEILLANCE OF HEPATITIS C ANTIBODY TESTING, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, 2009 TO 2019

Authors:

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Background: Monitoring trends in hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing is important for evaluating strategies that aim to increase testing and assessing progress towards hepatitis C elimination. The aim of this study was to describe trends in HCV antibody testing and test yield among individuals attending primary care clinics in Victoria, Australia, including trends after increased access to hepatitis C treatment in 2016.

Methods: Data from 12 primary care clinics in Victoria, Australia, specialising in the health of people who inject drugs and providing general health care were used. Analyses included trends in HCV Ab tests, individuals tested and test yield (positive tests/all tests) from January 1st 2009 to 31st December 2019. A generalised linear model was used to assess trends in testing and a χ^2 test assessed the trend in test yield. Analyses were stratified by age and sex.

Results: Overall the number of HCV antibody tests increased each year on average by 6% (95% CI 4–9%) as did the number of individuals tested (7% increase each year, 95% CI 4–9%). The number of unique individuals that tested HCV antibody positive remained stable at ~450-500 individuals per annum, and test yield declined (p for trend <0.001) 2009–2019. There were more tests among females, but test yield was consistently higher among males, and highest among older males (≥ 30 vs <30 years). After 2016, the number of tests increased only modestly, the number of individuals positive did not increase and the test yield remained stable at ~10%.

Conclusion: Overall HCV antibody testing increased over time. However, testing increased modestly post-2016 and there was no increase in the number of HCV antibody positive tests nor test yield, raising concern about insufficient testing and diagnoses rates among people living with hepatitis C and progress towards elimination.

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