Blood-borne viruses and STIs

Find trusted information about blood-borne viruses (BBVs) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including how they are spread, how to reduce your risk, testing, treatment, vaccination and where to get support.

Hepatitis B

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) causes hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) and can also cause long term liver damage. There is a vaccine available to prevent hepatitis B infection, which should be given to all individuals who are at risk from hepatitis B infection.

Hepatitis C

The hepatitis C virus was first identified in 1989. It is acquired mostly through blood-to-blood contact, although a small number may be sexually acquired. Most people who are infected have mild or no symptoms initially, so are often unaware of their infection. However chronic hepatitis C results in long-term liver damage for about 20% of those infected.

HIV/AIDS

Transmission of HIV is predominantly through sexual intercourse, although it can also be transmitted by blood-to-blood contact and from an HIV-infected mother at birth.

The immediate public health challenges remain consistent across the UK: increasing incidence and prevalence of HIV; early identification of those infected; rising costs of care; inequalities in disease distribution and determinants; and the associated mortality and long-term morbidity.

STIs

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are diseases that can be transmitted by unprotected sex, read more about the types of STIs on Sexual Health NI.

Who is this page for?

This page provides information for the public, people with increased risk of infection, and health and social care professionals.

About blood-born viruses and STIs

Blood-born viruses (BBVs), including hepatitis B, C and HIV, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are important public health issues.
Many infections can be prevented, tested for and treated. Early diagnosis and treatment help improve health outcomes and reduce the spread of infection.

Prevention, testing and support

You can help reduce your risk by:

- practicing safer sex
- using condoms
- not sharing needles or injecting equipment
- getting vaccinated against hepatitis B if you're eligible
- getting tested if you think you've exposed to an infection

Early testing can help you access treatment sooner and reduce the risk of passing infections to others.

For trusted information on prevention, testing, treatment and sexual health services in Northern Ireland, visit Sexual Health NI.

Visit Sexual Health NI

For information on testing, treatment, prevention, services visit Sexual Health NI.

Information for the public

- Hepatitis (A, B, C, D) | HSC Public Health Agency
- HIV | nidirect
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) - Sexual Health NI
- Sexual health | nidirect
- Types of STIs - Sexual Health NI

Treatment and vaccination

Hepatitis B and C

- Hepatitis (A, B, C, D) | HSC Public Health Agency
- Northern Ireland Hepatitis B & C Managed Clinical Network | Northern Ireland Hepatitis B & C Managed Clinical Network

HIV/AIDS and STIs

- Preventing STIs - Sexual Health NI
- Vaccination - Sexual Health NI
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) - Sexual Health NI website contains useful information on all blood-borne viruses and STIs.

- **Genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics specialise in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of STIs and HIV.**
- Depending on where you live, services and advice on STI testing, your sexual health may be available from:
    - hospital clinics based in your local Trust area
        - Belfast Trust GUM
        - Northern Trust GUM
        - South Eastern Trust GUM
        - Southern Trust GUM
        - Western Trust GUM
    - online services (SH24)
    - your own GP
    - young people's services Free & Confidential Sexual Health & Wellbeing Advice | Common Youth

Guidance for healthcare professionals

- Information for Healthcare Professionals | Northern Ireland Hepatitis B & C Managed Clinical Network
- Hepatitis (A, B, C, D) | HSC Public Health Agency
- Guidelines for the management of HIV positive pregnant women in Northern Ireland | HSC Public Health Agency

Data and surveillance

Blood-borne viruses and STIs surveillance | HSC Public Health Agency

Types of viruses and STIs covered

Hepatitis B

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) causes hepatitis (inflammation of the liver) and can also cause long term liver damage. There is a vaccine available to prevent hepatitis B infection which should be given to all individuals who are at risk from hepatitis B infection. There is very effective treatment available to keep hepatitis B virus under control.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). It can affect and damage the liver, and cause inflammation and scarring of the liver tissue, and sometimes significant liver damage. It may lead to cancer of the liver and possible death. It is acquired mostly through blood-to-blood contact, although a small number may be sexually acquired. Most people who are infected have mild or no symptoms initially, so are often unaware of their infection. There is very effective treatment available but you can catch HCV more than once.

HIV/AIDS

Transmission of HIV is predominantly through sexual intercourse, although it can also be transmitted by blood-to-blood contact and from an HIV-infected mother at birth.

The immediate public health challenges remain consistent across the UK: increasing incidence and prevalence of HIV; early identification of those infected; rising costs of care; inequalities in disease distribution and determinants; and the associated mortality and long-term morbidity.

STIs

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are diseases that can be transmitted by unprotected sex, read more about the **types of STIs on Sexual Health NI**.

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- Hepatitis (A, B, C, D, E)