SPAIN
can eliminate hepatitis
NATIONAL HEPATITIS
ELIMINATION PROFILE

Hepatitis B virus (HBV)

YES*
HBV elimination goal

NO
Elimination of HBV mother to child transmission goal

Hepatitis C virus (HCV)

YES*
HCV elimination goal

Action Plan
At least 7 autonomous communities have HCV elimination strategic plans, including Andalusia, Aragon, Basque, the Canary Islands, Cantabria, Catalonia, and Navarre

*Adopted by the Alliance for the Elimination of Viral Hepatitis in Spain (AEHVE)

THE HEALTH BURDEN OF VIRAL HEPATITIS

0.22% (0.1-0.34%)
Prevalence of HBsAg, 2018
Adults 20-80 yrs old
Prevalence of anti-HDV among persons HBsAg+, 2018, 7.7%

0.17% (0.08-0.28%)
Prevalence of chronic HCV, 2018
Adults 20-80 yrs old
Prevalence of anti-HCV, Persons who inject drugs, 2014: 64%
Prevalence of chronic HCV (RNA+), Persons born between 1958-1967, 2018: 0.5%
PROGRESS TOWARDS 2020 WHO ELIMINATION GOALS

PREVENTION OF NEW INFECTIONS AND MORTALITY

**HBV**
- Percentage change in new infections, 2015-2019: 83%
  - WHO 2020 Target: -30%
- Percentage change in deaths, 2015-2019: NO CHANGE
  - WHO 2020 Target: -10%

**HCV**
- Percentage change in new infections: NO DATA
  - WHO 2020 Target: -30%
- Percentage change in deaths, 2015-2018: -53%
  - WHO 2020 Target: -10%

Prevalence of HBsAg in children < 5 years (%)
- 0.03% (0.02-0.04%)
  - SDG 2020 Target: 1%
ACCESS TO RECOMMENDED VACCINATION, TESTING AND TREATMENT

**Hepatitis B vaccination coverage for newborns**

WHO 2020 Target 50%

**NO UNIVERSAL POLICY**

< 24 hours

**98%** HepB 3 dose vaccine coverage for infants, 2020

WHO 2020 Target 90%

**NO DATA**

Proportion of diagnosed HBV persons receiving appropriate treatment

NO DATA

**119** Number of needles-syringes per PWID per year, 2020

WHO 2020 Target 200

**71%** Proportion of persons living with HCV diagnosed, 2016

WHO 2020 Target 30%
In 2018, Spain was one of 12 countries on track for HCV elimination, but the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered efforts to maintain the cascade of care for HCV and many microelimination programs.

In Madrid, over 90% of those in high-risk groups have been tested for HCV and over 96% of individuals eligible for treatment are either in ongoing treatment or treated.

POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR THE ELIMINATION OF HEPATITIS

ACHIEVEMENT

Routine official reports to monitor HBV and HCV.

Estimates of HBV and/or HCV economic burden.

Monitoring of HBV and HCV diagnosis and treatment.

INNOVATIONS

SITHepaC, the Chronic Hepatitis C Patient Treatment Monitoring Information System, monitors HCV diagnosis and treatment. The autonomous communities report diagnosed cases of chronic HBV. Data on HBV treatments are not collected.

ROADBLOCKS

No studies for HBV

STRATEGIC INFORMATION

Partially Adopted

Partially Adopted

Achievements

Spain has treated more patients per million population than any other country and launched the Hepatitis C Approach Plan in the National Health System (PEAHC).

The annual percent decline in HCV-related mortality accelerated 6-fold, from about -3% to -18% after the introduction of direct acting antivirals (2001-2014 vs 2015-2018). A decrease in the indications for liver transplantation due to HCV has also been observed in this period.
**ROADBLOCKS**

Reporting of acute and chronic HBV and HCV cases to the Ministry of Health from the autonomous regions can be incomplete and not standardized, impairing interpretation.

*SITHePAc does not track total number of HCV tests performed*

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**PREVENTION OF MOTHER TO CHILDREN TRANSMISSION**

Policy for hepatitis B vaccination of newborns (within 24 hours)  

- Partially Adopted
- Selective policy: newborns born to mothers HBsAg+

Recommendations for:

- HBV testing of pregnant women  
  - Adopted

- HCV testing of pregnant women  
  - Not Adopted

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**ACCESS AND REGISTRATION OF MEDICINES AND TESTS**

- **HCV:** Registration of originator DAAs  
  - Adopted

- **HCV:** Eligible for generic DAAs  
  - Not Eligible

- **HCV:** Registration of generic medicines  
  - Not Applicable

- Licensed point-of-care PCR testing to detect HBV and HCV  
  - Adopted

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**TESTING TO DIAGNOSE HBV AND HCV INFECTION**

Testing recommendations for:

- **HBV:** Risk-based  
  - Adopted

- **HBV:** Age-Cohort or Universal  
  - Not Adopted
HCV: Risk-based

HCV: Age-Cohort or Universal

HDV (for HBsAg+ patients)

No patient co-pays for HBsAg and anti-HCV testing

ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2019, AEHVE launched the national campaign “Give Hepatitis C a happy ending”, to which the well-known actor Carmelo Gómez lent his image for an ad that was screened in almost all of Spain’s cinemas.

In 2022, integrated screening of HBV, HDV and HCV with one sample was recommended by Asociación Española para el Estudio del Hígado (AEEH), la Alianza para la Eliminación de las Hepatitis Viricas en España (AEHVE), el Grupo de Estudio de las Hepatitis Viricas (GEHEP) de la Sociedad Española de Enfermedades Infecciones y Microbiología Clínica (SEIMC) y la Sociedad Española de Patología Digestiva (SEPD).

INNOVATIONS

Many hospitals have implemented programs to find HCV patients loss to follow-up and re-link them to care.

Many hospital systems have implemented HCV reflex virologic testing—reducing the number of clinic visits by 2 from screening to HCV treatment initiation. In two years, the percent of hospitals implementing HCV reflex testing or “diagnosis in one-step” increased from 31% to 89% according to AEHVE.

ROADBLOCKS

Since the majority of patients living with hepatitis C are unaware of their infection, additional screening guidance beyond risk-based recommendations are needed to increase HCV case findings—either universal or age-cohort screening should be considered. Universal screening or age cohort screening is a recommendation from scientific societies that, until now, has not been incorporated into the Screening Guide of the Ministry of Health.

Point-of-care testing remains underutilized and underappreciated as a critical tool for reaching vulnerable populations. A 2020 study by AEHVE found only between 28-35% of all participating hospitals reporting having dried blood spot technology available.

Additional public awareness campaigns are needed to increase demand for testing.

The region of Cantabria recommends age-cohort screening for persons 40–69 years-old.

In addition, the Andalusian Plan for Viral Hepatitis will also conduct age-based screening. Recommendations exist but not widely implemented.

The Spanish National Health Service offers free screening to everyone.
## ACCESS TO HBV AND HCV TREATMENT

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<th>Developed</th>
<th>Not Adopted</th>
<th>Adopted</th>
<th>Partially Adopted</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HBV:</strong></td>
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<td>National treatment guidelines</td>
<td>Developed</td>
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<td>Simplified care: Simplified treatment and monitoring algorithm for primary care providers</td>
<td>Not Adopted</td>
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<td>Simplified care: No patient treatment co-pays</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simplified care algorithm: Less than 2 clinic visits during treatment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simplified care algorithm: Non-specialists can prescribe treatment</td>
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<tr>
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<td>HDV: National treatment guidelines</td>
<td>Partially Adopted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Included in HBV treatment guidelines but not fully implemented</td>
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### ACHIEVEMENTS

**In 2015,** the National Health System in Spain launched a plan to progressively provide access of all HCV-infected patients to the DAAs regimens without treatment restrictions.

**In February 2017,** scientific societies and patient associations created the Alliance for the Elimination of Viral Hepatitis in Spain (AEHVE), to advance progress toward hepatitis elimination.

**Prior to COVID-19,** Spain had the highest number of hepatitis C treatments per million inhabitants.
**INNOVATIONS**

To accelerate the elimination of the disease in Spain, AEHVE created the #hepCityFree program expanding commitments of city councils. Sevilla was the first city to sign-on to #hepCityFreesample.

**ROADBLOCKS**

*Primary care providers are not permitted to prescribe HBV and HCV treatment*

Some patients receive positive HCV serological tests but are not linked to care.

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**HEALTH EQUITY AND ADDRESSING DISPARITIES**

- National strategy addresses populations most affected \(^2\)
  - Adopted

- National anti-discrimination laws against persons living with hepatitis B and/or C \(^19\)
  - Not Adopted

- National policy for adult hepatitis B vaccination \(^28\)
  - Adopted

- National policy for:
  - Harm reduction for persons who inject drugs (PWID) \(^29\)
    - Adopted
  - Syringe exchange in federal prisons \(^30\)
    - Adopted

- Number of needles/syringes per PWID per year \(^10\)
  - 119
    - WHO 2020 Target 200

- Number of opioid substitution therapy recipients per 100 PWID \(^19,28\)
  - 90

- Decriminalization of possession of syringes & paraphernalia \(^29\)
  - Adopted

- Decriminalization of drug use \(^22\)
  - Partially Adopted

For people who inject drugs, people who are incarcerated but lacks other groups with risk behaviors, including contacts of HBsAg+ carriers.
INNOVATIONS

The Prison Hepatitis Project in Catalonia reduced the viremic HCV prevalence from 4.3% in June 2018 to 1.6% in September 2019 through practices such as HCV screening upon admission, HCV treatment without restrictions, and a liaison nurse coordinating continuation of HCV treatment after persons are released from prison.

Micro-elimination project planned in Balearic Islands among persons who inject drugs.

Dried blood spot testing has been shown to be an effective screening strategy for reaching people who inject drugs.

In Madrid, a simplified point-of-care model (OraQuick rapid HCV antibody test, Xpert HCV VL fingerstick assay) for screening for active HCV infection via a mobile unit with nurse and a navigator/educator achieved 77% linkage to care.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Drug consumption rooms are available in all parts of the country

In 2016, Spain initiated an innovative pilot program to screen and treat HCV in prisons. A clinical trial, JAILFREE-C study, evaluated systematic HCV screening and treatment among those residing in El Dueso — a long-stay prison. The program cured > 95% of treated prisoners.

ROADBLOCKS

Spain’s fragmented health system does not always serve high-risk populations, such as persons who are incarcerated

Late presentation of chronic HCV remains common. Studies by Picchio et al found that about one-fourth of the patients including PWID present with advanced liver disease or late-stage liver disease at first consultation for HCV care.

Despite progress in improving access to HCV treatment for persons who are incarcerated, additional barriers include lack of integration of prison health records and comunidades health records, limited number of liver specialists in the prison system, and the need to transfer patients to a hospital setting to deliver treatment.

During COVID-19, a survey of 11 harm reduction centers found that the average number of service users across decreased by 22% in comparison to the same period in the previous year and the average needle distribution decreased by 40% in comparison to 2019.

In Catalonia, the HepCdetect II Study found only 32% of PWID with HCV infection are treated. Only 18% of HCV infected migrants who are PWID are treated for HCV.

Additional efforts are needed to monitor reinfection of men who have sex with men and persons who inject drugs.
FINANCING

Public budget line for HBV and HCV testing and treatment

Adopted

Funds from the Global Fund for TB, AIDS, and Malaria used for co-infected patients, when relevant

Not Applicable

ACHIEVEMENTS

To reduce the total cost of treatment, the Ministry of Health negotiated volume-pricing agreements

The government also offered credit facilities so that the regions’ DAA HCV treatment spending would not affect their long-term financial stability—a mechanism similar to those deployed for other public health programmes

ROADBLOCKS

Regional governments concerned by non-drug costs of elimination program, including staffing and infrastructure costs

Additional funding is needed for expanded case finding
NEXT STEPS TOWARD ELIMINATION

- Consider expanding HCV screening recommendations for universal (at least once in a lifetime) or age-cohort (i.e. 50-70 yr olds) to increase number of persons
- Expand “test and treat” program for persons who are incarcerated and simplify treatment algorithm in prison settings
- Implement micro-elimination strategies and continue to expand outreach programs and pathways to care for vulnerable populations, including PWID, MSM, and migrants.
- Find untreated patients with positive serology tests and re-link to care
- Ensure coordination across autonomous communities on testing and treatment policies
- Seek to implement test and treat strategies for immediate treatment initiation after HCV diagnosis
- Establish coordination pathways between primary care providers and liver specialists
- Include viral hepatitis prevention, testing, and treatment in the primary care portfolio of common services offered at primary care providers, “la cartera de servicios”
- Establish indicators to monitor HCV care services and progress toward elimination
- Emphasize the need for follow-up with specialists in the case of F3/ F4 patients to monitor liver cancer risk and liver functioning
- Implement micro-elimination strategies for PWID, MSM, and immigrants from areas with a high prevalence of HCV infection.
- Create HBV and HCV community testing sites and referral centers
- Invest in public awareness campaigns on hepatitis to reduce stigma and improve general understanding of risk behaviors and prevention
- Continue to expand reflex HCV testing and simplify the testing algorithm to improve linkage to care

SOURCES


WORKING TOGETHER,
WE WILL ACHIEVE ELIMINATION.

This National Hepatitis Elimination Profile (N-HEP) was developed by the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination. Funding for this N-HEP was provided by Gilead Sciences. The Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination retained final control over the content.

The Coalition thanks AEHVE, especially Javier Garcia-Samaniego, IS Global at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, especially Jeff Lazarus and Camila Picchio, Maria Buti, and ASSCAT, especially Teresa Casanovas for their review and feedback.