

**By Laura Everett-Coles**

When people say there's good news and bad news which do you normally ask to hear first? I usually say the bad news because then I hope I will be cheered up by the good news afterwards!

The story of Hepatitis C is a story of two types of news. Firstly the bad.

Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus - meaning it's carried in the blood which sometimes means it shows no symptoms until the liver is badly damaged meaning people can be carrying the virus for many years and feel perfectly well.

Around 160,000 people in the UK are thought to be living with chronic Hep C infection, and injecting psychoactive drugs, such as heroin, is the biggest risk factor. A 2015 survey sample of people who had ever or were still injecting psychoactive drugs found 53% of them had the disease but were unaware of it. So did over 5% of people surveyed who injected image or performance enhancing drugs, such as anabolic steroids.

This meant their health was deteriorating and they could have been spreading the disease without knowing it. Because this virus is like a silent assassin people often only come to health services when they develop symptoms and by then the harm may already have been done and they could have end stage liver disease or cancer which will threaten their survival.

The sharing of needles and syringes is the most common way the disease is transmitted and infects other people.

The World Health Organisation has laid down a challenge to health services to reduce the new cases of chronic Hepatitis C by 30% by 2020 and by 80% by 2030. We can only achieve this if we start working in different ways to try and find people who have Hepatitis C and get them treated.

Now, after the bad news here comes the really good news:

Hepatitis C is completely curable and could actually be eradicated worldwide!

Public Health Dorset are working with the charity Liver4life and Royal Bournemouth Hospital to take up the challenge of achieving a Dorset free of this disease.

Treatment for Hepatitis C infection used to be complicated and often had side effects but now there is new treatment available which for most people means taking just one tablet a day

for 3 months with a 95% cure rate. I'm not talking about temporarily, I mean to totally cure it and prevent more liver damage, allowing the liver to repair and improve as much as it can (provided the person takes steps to prevent re-infection)

A series of 4 outreach events are being run across Dorset to find more people in the population who have Hepatitis C and to offer them a quick non-invasive fibroscan of their liver carried out by a nurse in a private room at each event which will tell them how well their liver is doing.

These are being held on:

**Friday 28th July, World Hepatitis Day, 9am to 4pm**

Sovereign Shopping Centre, Boscombe, with a Health Bus  
600 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, BH1 4SX

**Thursday 17th August, 9am to 1pm**

Poole PACT, Civic Centre Annexe, Park Road, Poole, BH15 2RU

**Monday 21st August, 9am to 1pm**

Blandford Hospital, Milldown Road, Blandford Forum, DT11 7SH

**Wednesday 23rd August, 9am to 1pm**

Weymouth Community Hospital Outpatients Department  
3 Melcombe Avenue, Weymouth, DT4 7TB

So if you have Hepatitis C why not come to an event and chat confidentially to the staff there and have a scan. If you would like a scan on the day please do not eat or drink anything for three hours beforehand. Then, if you want, you can go onto the waiting list for treatment and if you have scarring in your liver then you may be able to get onto the new treatment straight away.

If you do not need treatment straight away you shouldn't have much to worry about and while you are waiting you can be monitored and supported.

You can only protect yourself by taking action. Let's share some liver love – don't wait to get on the waiting list!

For more information visit [www.liver4life.org.uk](http://www.liver4life.org.uk)

**Hepatitis C in England: 2017 Report. Public Health England.**