Acute Hepatitis C in HIV-negative men who have sex with men in the Netherlands and Belgium: a call for action

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Background

- HIV treatment as prevention (TaSP) and HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) reduce the risk of HIV transmission.
- Sexual mixing between HIV positive and negative men having sex with men (MSM) could increase.
- Hepatitis C (HCV) can be sexually transmitted in MSM.
- Until recently HCV was thought to be limited to HIV-infected MSM.

Methods

- Through the Dutch Acute HCV in HIV Study (a Dutch-Belgian prospective multicenter study on the treatment of acute HCV, NCT02600325) and the Be-PrEP-ared study (a PrEP project in Antwerp, EudraCT2015-000054-37) several HCV infections were reported in HIV-negative MSM.

Results

- Ten cases of acute HCV were diagnosed in HIV-negative MSM.
- Median age was 39.5 years (range 25-59).
- HCV diagnosis was made at:
  - at an PrEP clinic (n=5)
  - an sexually transmitted infection (STI) clinic (n=2)
  - by the general practitioner (n=2)
  - by the infectiologist (n=1)
- Reported risk factors:
  - 10 patients reported unprotected anal intercourse (UAI)
  - 4 patients had a concomitant STI at the time of HCV diagnosis
  - 6 patients reported drug use during sex (chemsex)
  - 1 patient reported injection drug use during sex (slipping)
- Of the patients diagnosed at the PrEP clinic, 1 was diagnosed before the start of PrEP and 4 after the start of PrEP.

![Table 1](https://example.com/table1.png)

Discussion

- While previous reports on HCV in HIV-negative MSM were the result of an active screening policy as part of an observational study or a PrEP program, our case series illustrates that also outside these settings the diagnosis of acute HCV should be considered in HIV-negative MSM.
- Our observation calls for a larger nationwide epidemiological study on the prevalence, incidence and risk factors of HCV infection in HIV-uninfected MSM to get a reliable estimate of the size of the problem.

Conclusion

- In the changing landscape of TaSP and PrEP, reliable and up-to-date epidemiological data on HCV among HIV-uninfected MSM are needed and will help in developing evidence based testing policies.