

Number of liver disease cases soar in UK... but fall across Europe

- **Obesity, alcohol and hepatitis behind rise, say experts**
- **'Awareness of condition must rise' says health chief**

By Sam Webb



Warning: The number of people suffering from liver disease is rising in the UK, say health experts. However, it is falling in the rest of Europe (file picture)

The number of people suffering from liver disease is on the increase in England while other European countries it is decreasing, health experts said.

The UK's chief medical officer (CMO) Professor Dame Sally Davies said that obesity, undiagnosed hepatitis infections and harmful alcohol use are among the causes for the rising tide of disease. She said that the public needs to have a better awareness about liver health as the three major causes of liver disease are all preventable.

Between 2000 and 2009, deaths from chronic liver disease and cirrhosis in the under 65s increased by about 20% while they fell by the same amount in most EU countries, according a new report by the CMO.

She said that local health authorities should prioritise preventing, identifying and treating liver disease.

Dame Sally said: 'I have done a comprehensive analysis of the state of the country's health, and found some areas where we are doing really well and others where there is still a lot of improvement needed.

'I was struck by the data on liver disease particularly. This is the only major cause of preventable death that is on the increase in England that is generally falling in other comparable European nations. We must act to change this.'

More...

Sir Richard Thompson, president of the Royal College of Physicians, said: 'We echo the CMO's concerns, which could not come at a better time as we await the Government's decision on the most appropriate level for a minimum price for alcohol.'

'These figures underline the urgent need for a 50p minimum unit price for alcohol, which would hit younger drinkers and heavy drinkers, while not greatly affecting moderate drinkers.'



Health experts say rising levels of obesity and unsafe alcohol consumption are two major factors in the rise of liver disease in the UK. Pictures posed by models

Dr Vivienne Nathanson, the British Medical Association's (BMA) director of professional activities, said: 'It is extremely worrying that so many people are dying in England from preventable liver disease, especially given this illness is falling in many other European countries.'

'One of the major causes of liver disease is harmful drinking. The BMA has been campaigning for many years for action to tackle alcohol misuse, including the introduction of a minimum price per unit of alcohol, an end to two-for-one deals that can promote irresponsible drinking and more regulation on the marketing of alcohol.'

'If we are to turn the tide on rising liver disease, we must tackle harmful drinking as well as focusing on other public health issues such as obesity.'