Chinese Notifiable Infectious Diseases Surveillance Report

Hepatitis C

December 2023

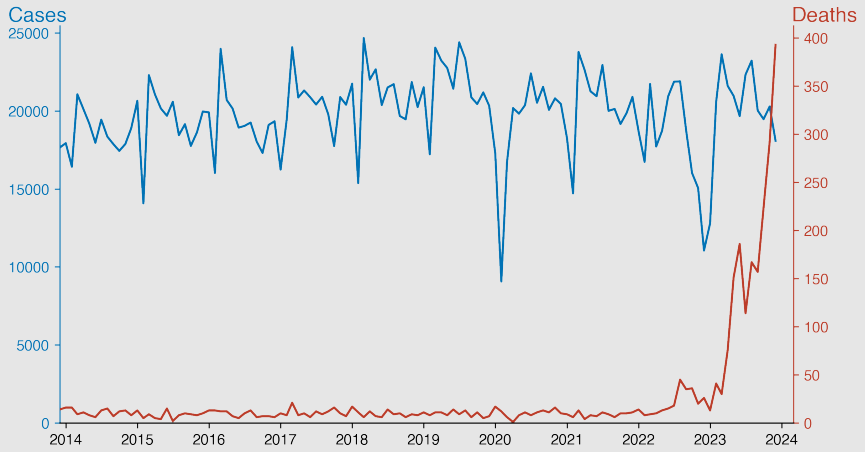
Introduction

Hepatitis C is a viral infection primarily affecting the liver, caused by the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). The infection can range from mild lasting only a few weeks, to lifelong severe illness leading to cirrhosis or liver cancer. HCV mostly spreads through blood-to-blood contact, mainly via shared drug injection equipment and, less commonly, through sex transmission or from an infected mother to her baby. There is no preventive vaccine available, however, antiviral medicines can cure most cases of the infection.

Highlights

- Sharp rise in Hepatitis C-related deaths from 2022 to 2023, with December 2023 deaths reaching 393, indicating a critical situation requiring immediate attention.
- Cases peaked in 2018 and 2019, with significant fluctuations observed, suggesting a need for targeted public health interventions.
- The sudden case decline in February 2020 aligns with COVID-19 responses, hinting at the impact of broad public health measures.
- The late 2023 mortality spike necessitates investigation into viral mutations, healthcare delivery issues, or reporting changes.

Temporal Trend



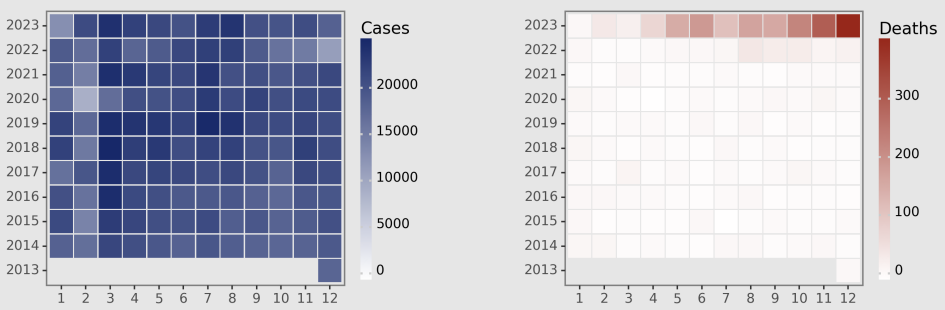
Cases Analysis

From December 2013 to December 2023, Hepatitis C cases in Chinese mainland displayed fluctuations, initially ranging between 16,000 and 24,000 cases per month. A temporary dip to 9,068 occurred in February 2020, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic onset, potentially due to reduced testing or reporting. In subsequent years, the cases generally maintained previous levels. However, a marked decline began in 2022, with cases decreasing to 11,050 in December, and then a rebound was observed, climbing back over 20,000 cases by the end of 2023.

Deaths Analysis

Over the same period, Hepatitis C-related deaths remained relatively low, oscillating between single to mid-double digits from December 2013 until July 2022. A sudden surge in deaths began in August 2022, escalating to 393 by December 2023. This dramatic increase signals a severe public health issue, possibly indicating changes in the virulence of the pathogen, reduced access to effective treatment, reporting changes, or other unidentified factors exacerbating the disease's lethality.

Distribution



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