

EXPANSION OF HEPATITIS C SCREENING AND MANAGEMENT AMONG HIGH RISK GROUPS IN PUNJAB DURING COVID

Since Hepatitis-C is a blood-borne disease, injecting drug users (IDUs, PLHIVs and other persons) are at very high risk of contracting the disease. Recognizing the need to reach out to such high-risk individuals, the Punjab government expanded the horizon of the existing screening and management of Hepatitis-C from passive screening towards active screening and management.

The active screening program was envisaged in 2017 and further launched in October 2018, to initiate Anti-HCV screening for PLHIVs at ART centers and IDUs at TI/OST sites across the state.



The project was initiated with the support of FIND (Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics) and now taken over by the State. For Viral load testing four GeneXpert machines were installed at four laboratories.

Viral load sample transport networks were mapped to screening centres (ART/OST sites) thus minimizing the sample transport distance, decreasing costs, and optimizing lab capacities.

By developing simplified data and patient flows, the Punjab Government streamlined linkages to care and developed a screening protocol to scale-up HCV testing to PLHIVs at 13 ART centres and IDUs at co-located 11 OST centres.

Till date, more than 26,000 patients have been screened at ART centres and more than 3400 patients screened at OST centre.

HCV Screening during COVID situation

To facilitate effective outreach to patients, the 13 ART centres and co-located 11 OST centres were designated as Treatment centres in June-2020. Under COVID situation it helped ensuring that positive patients get Treatment at the respective sites only at the earliest.

Capacity building

The Medical and Para medical staff of 13 ART and 11 OST sites were sensitized and trained by the experts from PGI and State for screening and management of Hepatitis-C.

Virtual training was organized for Peer Support in July-2020 using ECHO platform for data digitization.

Description and Human Resource

Non Complicated cases are treated at respective sites, complicated cases are referred to co-located District Hospitals or Government Medical Colleges for prescription and medicine is dispensed form ART/OST site only.

At ART and OST sites, screening and Treatment initiation is being done by PSACS staff.

Viral load testing is being done in PPP mode under NVHCP and cost booked under NVHCP. Drugs provided to PSACS by NVHCP.

Online portal entries are done by the Peer Support appointed under NVHCP at the Co-located District Hospitals or Government Medical Colleges on routine basis.

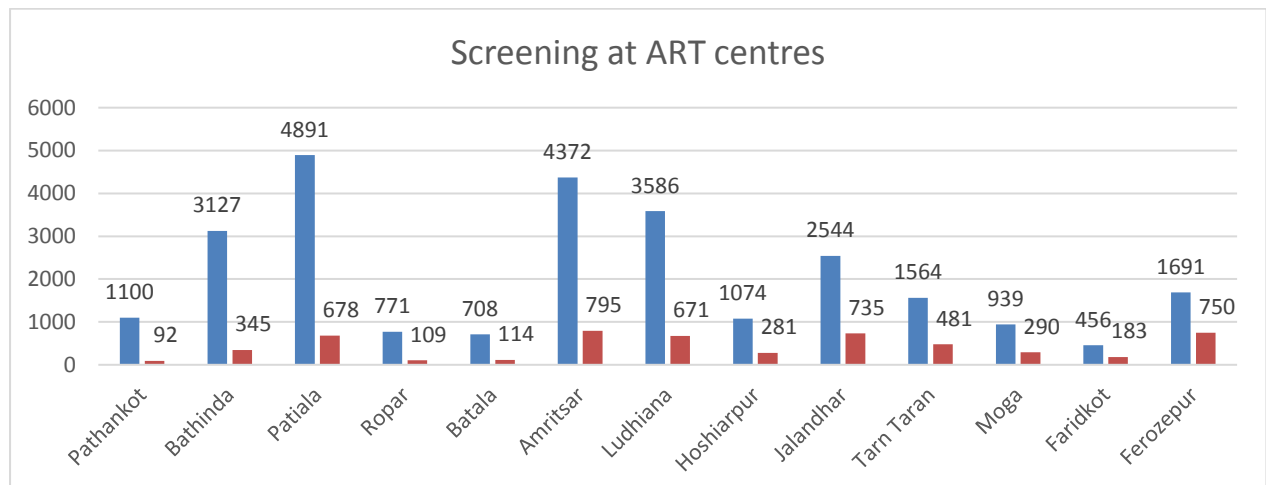
Cost effectiveness

No extra cost is levied. The cost of screening, viral load testing and medicine is booked under NVHCP.

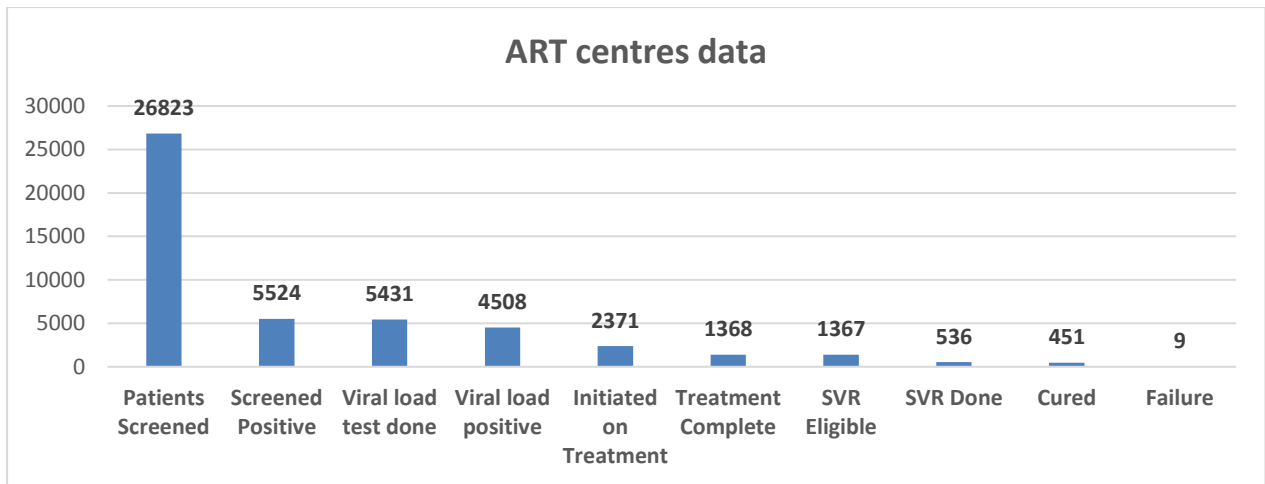
Designating ART and OST centres as Treatment sites has reduces additional cost of the patients as well.

Results

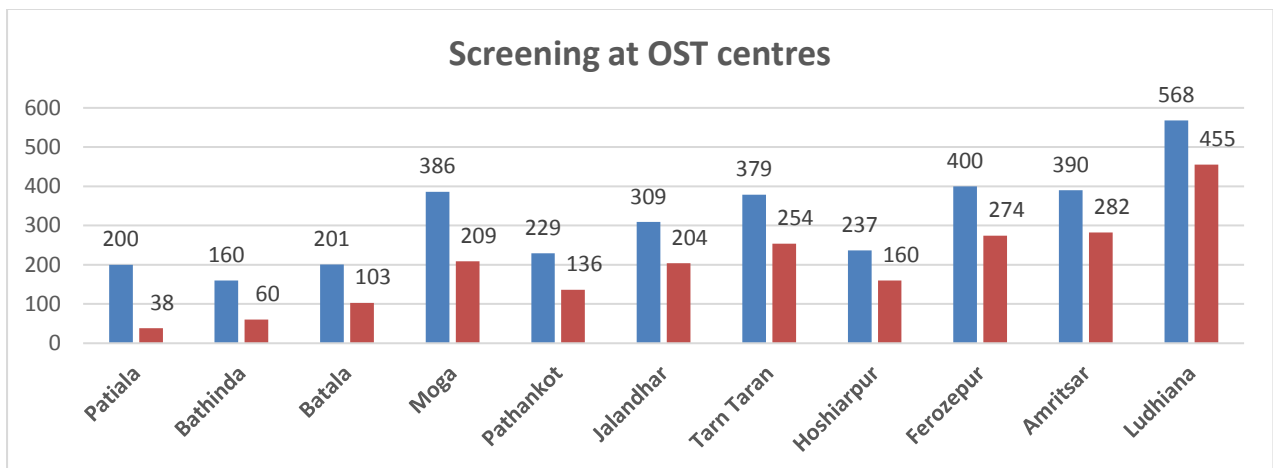
- Till date, more than 26, 823 patients have been screened with an average positivity of 20.5%. The positivity varies from 8% at Pathankot to 44% at Ferozpur.



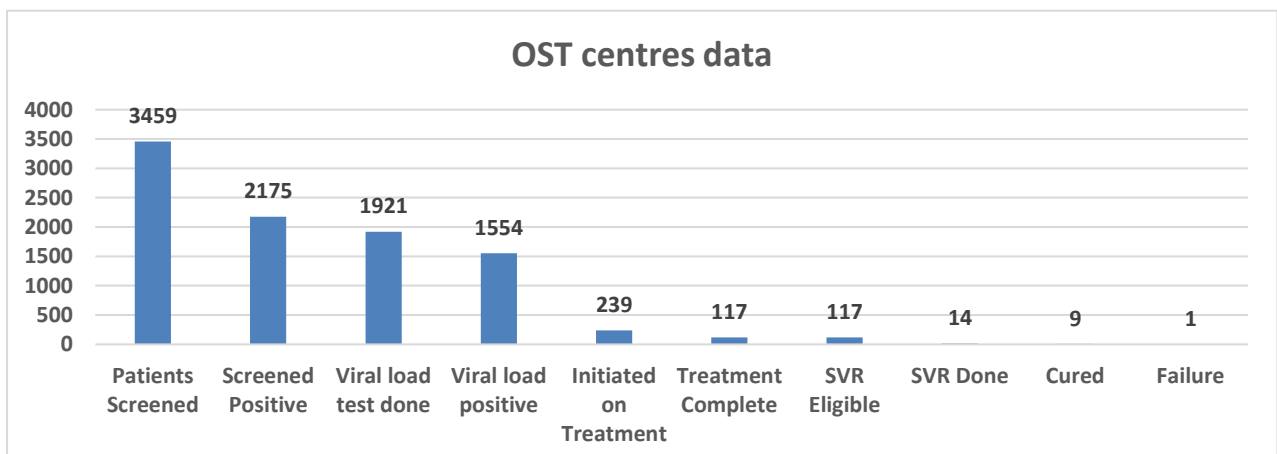
- Of these 26,823 screened PLHIVs at ART, 5,524 were found positive and 5,532 were referred for viral load test in which 4,508 were found positive.
- Till date 2,371 have been initiated on treatment, out of which 1,368 completed their treatment.
- Total 536 patients were tested for SVR (viral load test post treatment) and 451 were cured with Cure rate of 84%.



- Till date, more than 3,459 patients have been screened with an average positivity of 62.8%. The positivity varies from 19% at Patiala to 80% at Ludhiana.



- Of these 3,459 screened IDUs at OST, 2,175 were found positive and 1,921 were referred for viral load test in which 1,554 were found positive.
- Till date 2,39 have been initiated on treatment, out of which 117 completed their treatment.
- Total 14 patients were tested for SVR (viral load test post treatment) and 9 were cured with Cure rate of 64%.



Outcomes

1. Punjab has become the first state to initiate screening of High risk population.
2. Screening of all PLHIVs reporting at 13 ART and IDUs at 11 OST centres being done.
3. Based on the this, RUP syringes are being used in Punjab.
4. In collaboration with WHO, Punjab become the first state to implement “Injection Safety Implementation Project” thus reducing overall burden of diseases caused by unsafe injection practices and incorrect disposal of used injection waste
5. During COVID situation, 13 ART and 11 OST centres designated as Treatment centres thus ensuring that patients complete their treatment without any gap.

Way-forward

1. All patients at ART and OST centres to be screened for Hepatitis-C and initiated on treatment.
2. Screening of Hepatitis-B for all PLHIVs reporting at ART and IDUs at OST centres to be done.
3. Hepatitis-B positive patients will be initiated on treatment and Hepatitis-B negative patients will be vaccinated.