

Media Update

28 July 2017

WHO

Press Release

WHO commemorates World Hepatitis Day in Pakistan

The World Health Organization and its partners is commemorating today World Hepatitis Day to add momentum to efforts aimed at implementing WHO's global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis for 2016–2021 and to help Member States achieve the final goal: Eliminating Hepatitis. For this occasion an event will be held at Serena Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan on 10 August 2017.

In 2015 nearly 325 million people around the world were living with chronic hepatitis infections, out of which 1.34 million people died. In reality, both hepatitis B and C are preventable while hepatitis B is manageable and hepatitis C is now curable: 95% of people with hepatitis C can be completely cured within 2–3 months.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region is one of the regions most affected by viral hepatitis in the world. Estimates indicate that currently more than 15 million people are chronically infected with hepatitis C and 21 million with hepatitis B. Many people in the Region still acquire the infection in health care settings, through unsafe injections or inadequately screened blood transfusions.

Within the EMRO region, Pakistan and Egypt bear 80% of the disease burden and within Pakistan almost 12 million people are suffering from hepatitis B or C. Each year about 150,000 new cases are added. Majority of people catch this infection from the health care settings without being aware of it. The disease is called a silent killer because many patients remain undiagnosed and untreated for many years before developing complications and death.



Major risk factors for HBV and HCV infection transmission includes; therapeutic injections, syringe reuse, surgery, improper sterilization of invasive medical devices, blood transfusion, hospitalization and sharing of razors while getting shave from barbers. Some population groups are highly affected by HBV and HCV such as injecting drug users and thalassemia patients.

“No one should die of viral hepatitis and no one should get infected, as we know how to treat and prevent the infection”, said WHO Regional Director Dr Mahmoud Fikri. “I acknowledge the efforts of Member States in our Region. I commend those efforts and call for their acceleration. Many patients are waiting for us to make treatment available, affordable and accessible,” said Dr Fikri. “I call upon all Member States, local and international partners and civil society groups to join hands with WHO in this noble goal.”

In 2014, Member States of WHO adopted a comprehensive resolution urging countries to develop and implement coordinated multisectoral national plans for preventing, diagnosing, and treating viral hepatitis. In parallel, WHO developed the first-ever Global Health Sector Strategy for Viral Hepatitis. This strategy is rooted in the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals and to universal health coverage. It sets out the vision of global stakeholders and Member States towards eliminating viral hepatitis by 2030. At the regional level, WHO has given special priority to hepatitis B and C prevention, diagnosis and treatment. To guide implementation of the Global Health Sector Strategy for Viral Hepatitis within our region, a regional action plan for the hepatitis response has been developed. This action plan was endorsed by Member States.

Key challenges for an effective national response, in Pakistan included: limited timely and reliable data availability on coverage and quality of essential hepatitis services; unnecessary injection practices, capacity of staff on safe injection practices and effective sharp and waste management; unregulated blood transfusions in general as well as inadequate screening; low coverage of harm reduction services for PWIDs and Limited access to the new DAAs treatment in the public sector.

WHO and Centres for Disease Control (CDC) are actively engaged in strengthening the national response to Hepatitis in the country. National guidelines on Hepatitis C, were developed in 2015-16. Recently, in line with the Global Health Sector Strategy (GHSS) for Viral Hepatitis (VH) 2016–2021 and the WHO EMRO Regional Action Plan 2017-2021, a National Hepatitis



Strategic Framework (NHSF) has been developed, with consensus of national and the provincial stakeholders. The NHSF recognized safe injections, blood safety and harm reduction services, as key to achieve the NHSF, in addition to expansion of diagnostics and treatment services.

Campaign materials: <http://www.who.int/campaigns/hepatitis-day/2017/event/en/>

Posters: <http://www.who.int/campaigns/hepatitis-day/2017/posters/en/>

What can you do for World Hepatitis Day?

<http://www.who.int/campaigns/hepatitis-day/2017/what-you-can-do/en/>

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