



Message from
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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION
on the occasion of
WORLD HEPATITIS DAY

28 July 2017

Viral hepatitis is a major global epidemic that takes a heavy toll on human lives all around the world, however, was not considered a public health priority in the past. Today we have very powerful tools to prevent and treat viral hepatitis and we should wait no more. For this reason, WHO designated 28 July of every year as World Hepatitis Day. This occasion is a call for concerted global efforts aimed at heightening commitment, raising awareness and stepping up action to put an end to suffering due to viral hepatitis.

Our region has the highest prevalence of viral hepatitis C in the world. WHO estimates that more than 15 million people in the Region are currently chronically infected with hepatitis C, and 21 million with hepatitis B. Unfortunately, many people in the Region still acquire hepatitis B and C in the place where they least expect to, in health care settings, through unsafe injections and inadequately screened blood transfusions. Mother-to-child transmission is the main cause of hepatitis B among children. Furthermore, many people who are at risk of HIV are also at risk of hepatitis B and C infections, due to unsafe sexual practices or injecting drug use. Yet we have a wealth of evidence on how these transmissions can be prevented. We have missed past opportunities but we are now on the right path.

At the 67th session of the World Health Assembly, Member States adopted a comprehensive resolution urging countries to develop and implement coordinated multi-sectoral 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, and sets out a vision towards eliminating viral hepatitis globally 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 was developed, and was endorsed by the Member States in 2016.

In this respect, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Member States in our Region. Three countries are now producing generic antivirals, which allow them to treat their patients at affordable cost. Over one million people have been treated with the new direct acting antivirals for Hepatitis C alone in Egypt. I commend these efforts and call for accelerated action. Many patients are waiting for us to make treatment with those medicines available, affordable and accessible.

The theme and message of this year's World Hepatitis Day is "Eliminate Hepatitis". On this occasion, I call upon all Member States, local and international partners and civil society groups to join hands with WHO to reach this noble goal. No one should die of viral hepatitis and no one should get infected when we know how to prevent it.

Finally, I would like to assure you that WHO will continue to support and work closely with Member States and other partners to implement and scale up all interventions for viral hepatitis control, including providing birth-dose vaccination against hepatitis B, enhancing prevention strategies and ensuring equitable access to quality diagnosis and treatment; until hepatitis is eliminated from our region.

Thank you