

Current major event

Hepatitis: Know it. Confront it.

Like last year, the World Hepatitis Day will be celebrated across the world including in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) of WHO on 28 July. The global theme of the campaign continues to be : This is hepatitis. Know it. Confront it.

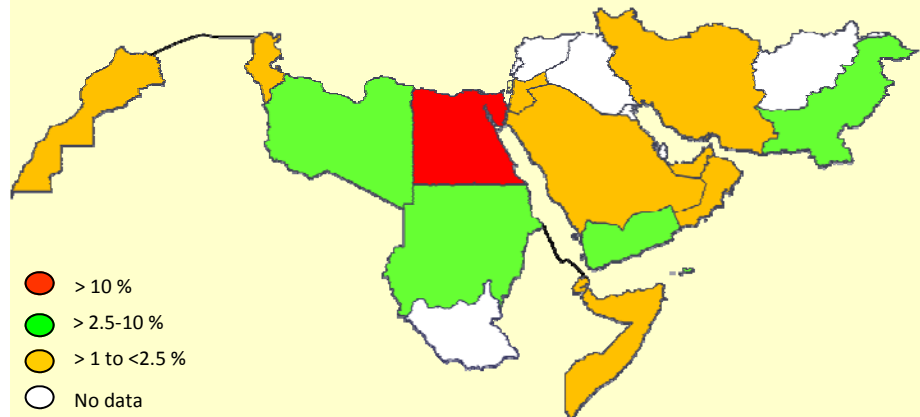
Editorial note

Viral hepatitis is a global public health problem affecting millions of people every year, causing disability and death. Viral hepatitis affects 1 in every 12 people worldwide. Current estimates indicate that viral hepatitis is the 8th leading cause of death worldwide causing close to 1 million deaths every year, on a par with deaths caused by HIV/AIDS or diarrhoeal diseases, and more than the number caused by tuberculosis and malaria.

All types of viral hepatitis (A, B, C, D and E) occur throughout the Eastern Mediterranean Region (*Please see the table*) Some countries in the region have higher infection rates for hepatitis C and hepatitis E than any other country in the world. The prevalence rate of chronic viral hepatitis (hepatitis B and C virus infection) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) is one of the highest in the world ranging from 2 to 10%. Civil unrest and conflict have undermined the health systems in many countries in the region. The region has seen many explosive outbreaks of hepatitis E and A in countries with large number of internally displaced populations and refugees with inadequate sanitation.

Hepatitis A and E are typically caused by ingestion of contaminated food and water. Hepatitis B, C and D are spread by infected body fluids, including blood or blood products, contaminated medical equipment, by sexual contact and from mother-to-child during birth. In particular, hepatitis B and C often lead to chronic infection, and are the most common cause of liver cirrhosis and cancer. Hepatitis is a preventable disease and can be eliminated within our life-

Estimated prevalence rate (%) of hepatitis C virus infection in the EMR



Source: Weekly Epidemiological Record, Volume-77, Issue-6, 08 February 2002.

Burden of Viral hepatitis in the EMR

| Hepatitis | Burden in the EMR |
|-------------|--|
| Hepatitis A | Unknown. Mostly associated with contaminated water and food |
| Hepatitis B | More than 170,000,000 people are chronically infected |
| Hepatitis C | Some 17,000,000 to 21,000,000 people are chronically infected |
| Hepatitis D | Unknown. Both super-infection and co-infection occur with hepatitis B virus |
| Hepatitis E | Unknown. Explosive outbreaks have been seen in many countries in the region. Infection in pregnancy is associated with a high risk of complications including deaths |

time. Effective and cheap vaccines are available that can provide life long protection from hepatitis B infection. On the other hand, Hepatitis C is a curable disease. The chronic nature of the hepatitis B and C calls for strong focus on screening, care and treatment. With early detection and appropriate management, the quality of life of millions of people living with this disease can be improved.

Good surveillance data and a national policy on hepatitis appropriate to the country situation are key to protecting people from hepatitis. The World Hepatitis Day is an opportunity to focus attention on what can be done for prevention and control of viral hepatitis. Government, civil society, NGOs, academia, patient groups, and health professionals need to combine efforts to confront and combat this silent epidemic.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Novel Coronavirus in Saudi Arabia and UAE; Hepatitis E in South Sudan; Meningococcal meningitis in South Sudan;

Current public health events of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Avian influenza

| | |
|--------------|---------------------|
| Egypt | [173 (63), 36.4%] |
| Indonesia | [192 (160), 83.3 %] |
| Viet Nam | [125 (62), 49.6%] |
| Cambodia | [31 (27), 87.1%] |
| Global total | [629 (375), 59.6%] |

Hepatitis E

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| South Sudan | [111 22 (202), 1.8%]# |
|-------------|-----------------------|

Novel Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Saudi Arabia | [70 (38), 54%] |
| Italy | [3 (0)] |
| Jordan | [2 (2), 100%] |
| France | [2 (1), 50%] |
| UAE | [1 (0)] |
| Tunisia | [2 (0)] |

Influenza A (H7N9) virus

| | |
|-------|-----------------|
| China | [134 (43), 32%] |
|-------|-----------------|

Meningococcal meningitis

| | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| South Sudan | [196 (13), 6.6%]# |
|-------------|-------------------|

Wild poliovirus

| | |
|---------|---------|
| Somalia | [1 (0)] |
|---------|---------|

CFR=Case-Fatality Rate; # Suspected cases