

## Current major event

### Hepatitis Can't Wait: World Hepatitis Day 2021

The theme of World Hepatitis Day this year was 'Hepatitis Can't Wait' with the key objective of urging Member States to step up the fight against hepatitis B and C and adopt coordinated strategies to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B virus, including in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

#### Editorial note

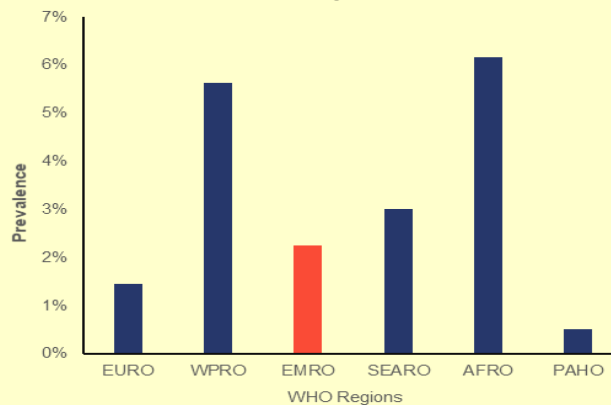
Viral hepatitis B and C cause severe liver disease, affecting the lives of 360 million people worldwide. With one person dying every 30 seconds from hepatitis B or C, no one should wait to act on viral hepatitis, even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region a total of 30 million people were chronically infected, reported so far. COVID-19 pandemic made it more difficult to deliver essential health services, including vaccination, diagnosis and care.

World Hepatitis Day is celebrated each year on 28 July to increase awareness of viral hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver that causes a range of health problems, including liver cancer. There are 5 main hepatitis viruses – A, B, C, D and E. However, hepatitis B and C infections are responsible for the largest number of deaths among all viral hepatitis infections.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region has achieved several successes in its fight against hepatitis in the past 5 years. It has led the way in hepatitis C testing and treatment, thanks to strong political commitment from Member States, especially Egypt. Also, 20 Member States have now achieved the target of reducing hepatitis B prevalence among children under 5 years of age to less than 1% through the implementation of successful infant immunization programmes.

Further effort is needed to achieve elimination. People in the Region are

### Prevalence of hepatitis B infection among the general population by WHO Region, till 2019



#### Impact of COVID-19 on the continuity of hepatitis services

- Hepatitis services were disrupted with the start of COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in low-and middle-income countries, as funding is frequently not embedded in domestic budgets.
- Hepatitis services were impacted by lockdown measures and the preoccupation of health facilities with COVID-19 patients. Health care workers and testing facilities were further mobilized for COVID-19 response.
- Immunization programmes were impacted in some countries, which may have strong repercussions on early childhood incidence, fueling an increase in the burden of the disease and providing a source of onward transmission to future generations that threatens progress towards the 2030 elimination goals.

still becoming infected with hepatitis viruses in health care settings because of unsafe injection practices. The coverage of hepatitis B birth-dose vaccination is also low (34%), prompting WHO's regional hepatitis campaign to focus on eliminating mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B virus, which can be achieved through vaccination starting at birth and screening pregnant mothers with a view to possible prophylaxis.

WHO recommends five key interventions for the successful elimination of hepatitis: vaccinating infants against hepatitis B, preventing mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B virus, ensuring blood and injection safety, reducing harm among people who inject drugs and testing people with a view to treatment. WHO is committed to continue working with countries to reach the targets set for hepatitis viruses in the Region.

#### Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

#### COVID-19 in 22 EMR countries

#### Current public health events of concern

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

#### Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): 2019-2021

Afghanistan	[150 778 (6936), 4.6%]
Bahrain	[269 949 (1384), 0.5%]
Djibouti	[11 659 (156), 1.3%]
Egypt	[284 641 (16 566), 5.8%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[4 119 110 (93 473), 2.3%]
Iraq	[1 704 363 (19146), 1.1%]
Jordan	[776 178 (10116), 1.3%]
Kuwait	[402 794 (2366), 0.6%]
Lebanon	[570 098 (7938), 1.4%]
Libya	[267 846 (3719), 1.4%]
Morocco	[687 292 (10255), 1.5%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[346 712 (3879), 1.1%]
Oman	[298 504 (3929), 1.3%]
Pakistan	[1 067 580 (23 865), 2.2%]
Qatar	[227 472 (601), 0.3%]
Saudi Arabia	[532 785 (8320), 1.6%]
Somalia	[15 798 (847), 5.4%]
Sudan	[37 515 (2780), 7.4%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[26 081 (1919), 7.4%]
Tunisia	[612 867 (21 025), 3.4%]
United Arab Emirates	[691 554 (1971), 0.3%]
Yemen	[7131 (1384), 19.4%]