

Press Release

World Hepatitis Alliance Calls on Governments to Take Urgent Action to Tackle Chronic Viral Hepatitis B & C Epidemic

Shocking lack of global statistics prompts creation of first global resource on hepatitis: The Hepatitis Atlas

Switzerland, Geneva. Monday 19 May, 2008 – The World Hepatitis Alliance, a newly formed Non-Governmental Organisation, today called on governments around the world to do more to drive improvements in prevention, diagnosis and treatment for people living with chronic viral hepatitis B and C.

Although it is estimated that 500 million, approximately one in 12 people, are infected with either chronic viral hepatitis B or C globally^{1, 2}, there is a serious lack of awareness and political will to tackle these diseases.

Marking the first ever truly international World Hepatitis Day, the World Hepatitis Alliance today launched “The Hepatitis Atlas: Completing the Data Map” – a resource designed to become the first global public compendium of statistics and information relating to chronic viral hepatitis B and C. The Hepatitis Atlas has been launched as a result of the shocking lack of up-to-date global statistics relating to the two viruses.

Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance, said the current lack of data highlighted the need for greater surveillance at local, national and international levels. “If this information is not easily available, how can governments begin to tackle these diseases that kill 1.5 million people a year?” Mr. Gore said. “Governments are simply working in the dark and need to do more to ensure chronic viral hepatitis B and C are high up on national and international healthcare agendas.”

The World Hepatitis Alliance is also asking governments to sign up to 12 Asks for 2012 aimed at combating chronic viral hepatitis B and C. The ‘12 Asks’ are a series of requests for commitment from policy makers to recognise the impact of the disease and the importance of adopting measures that address the issue from a public health perspective. “The challenge for viral hepatitis is to make healthcare authorities and policy makers aware that this disease, if not tackled today, will be a major burden in the next 20 years as today’s patients will develop liver cancer. It is better to act today than be unable to react tomorrow,” said Professor Driss Jamil, a specialist in hepatitis B and C at the Department of Medicine, University of Casablanca, Morocco, and one of 12 members of the World Hepatitis Alliance Public Health Panel.

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Professor Greg Dore, Head of the Viral Hepatitis Clinical Research Program, National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, and also a member of the Public Health Panel, added, “Increased awareness and understanding of the public health impact of chronic viral hepatitis is required to mobilise action on proven prevention and care strategies. Awareness raising will promote advocacy, improve global funding, and reduce the stigma and discrimination that affect many people with chronic viral hepatitis.”

Did You Know?

- 500 million people worldwide are currently infected with hepatitis B or C^{1,2}
- This is over 10 times the number infected with HIV/AIDS
- Between them, hepatitis B and C kill 1.5 million people a year
- One in every three people on the planet has been exposed to either or both viruses
- Most of the 500 million infected do not know

World Hepatitis Day

World Hepatitis Day is being observed on Monday 19 May and marks a brand new, entirely patient-led initiative. The day has been launched in response to the concern that chronic viral hepatitis has nowhere near the level of awareness nor the political will to tackle it that is seen in HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria. This is despite the fact that the numbers chronically infected with, and annually killed by, hepatitis B and C viruses are on the same scale.

World Hepatitis Alliance

World Hepatitis Day is being coordinated by the World Hepatitis Alliance, a newly established Non-Governmental Organisation that represents more than 200 hepatitis B and hepatitis C patient groups from around the world. The World Hepatitis Alliance is governed by a representative board of patient groups from seven world regions: Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, North America, South America, Australasia and Western Pacific. For more information visit www.worldhepatitisday.com on Monday 19 May.

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¹World Health Organization. Hepatitis B Fact Sheet: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs204/en/index.html> (accessed May 1, 2008)

² Initiative for Vaccine Research, Viral Cancers, Hepatitis C. World Health Organization, 2006.
http://www.who.int/vaccine_research/diseases/viral_cancers/en/index2.html (accessed May 1, 2008)