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WHO sounds alarm on viral hepatitis infections claiming 3500 lives each day

09 April 2024 | News

New incidence estimates indicate a slight decrease compared to 2019, but the overall incidence of viral hepatitis remains high



According to the World Health Organization (WHO) 2024 Global Hepatitis Report, the number of lives lost due to viral hepatitis is increasing. The disease is the second leading infectious cause of death globally, with 1.3 million deaths per year, the same as tuberculosis, a top infectious killer.

The report, released at the World Hepatitis Summit, highlights that despite better tools for diagnosis and treatment, and decreasing product prices, testing and treatment coverage rates have stalled.

New data from 187 countries show that the estimated number of deaths from viral hepatitis increased from 1.1 million in 2019 to 1.3 million in 2022. Of these, 83% were caused by hepatitis B, and 17% by hepatitis C. Every day, there are 3500 people dying globally due to hepatitis B and C infections.

Updated WHO estimates indicate that 254 million people live with hepatitis B and 50 million with hepatitis C in 2022. Half the burden of chronic hepatitis B and C infections is among people 30–54 years old, with 12% among children under 18 years of age. Men account for 58% of all cases.

Funding for viral hepatitis both at a global level or within dedicated country health budgets, is not sufficient to meet the needs. This arises from a combination of factors, including limited awareness of cost-saving interventions and tools, as well as competing priorities in global health agendas.

The report outlines a series of actions to advance a public health approach to viral hepatitis, designed to accelerate progress towards ending the epidemic by 2030. This includes expanding access to testing and diagnostics; shifting from policies to implementation for equitable treatment; strengthening primary care prevention efforts; simplifying service delivery, optimising product regulation and supply; developing investment cases in priority countries; and mobilising innovative financing.