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# Supporting advocates in the race to defeat meningitis

## Meningitis health communications

Examining channels, messaging and best practice in the African Meningitis Belt

*Robust communication strategies are essential in getting information, advice and guidance to the people who most need it. By strengthening health communication and engagement techniques and continuing our research to monitor progress and deepen our understanding, we have good reason to envisage a future free from meningitis epidemics.*

Dr Ephrem Tekle Lemango, UNICEF's Associate Director and Chief of Immunisation



### Why did Meningitis Research Foundation and UNICEF conduct this research?

To understand how meningitis is communicated to individuals and communities in the Meningitis Belt, from risk factors and symptoms to treatment and aftercare.

The research report highlights best practice but also identifies gaps and challenges.

The overall aim is to provide organisations and individuals working to defeat meningitis with insights and tools to support their communication activities.



### Where was the research conducted?

The African Meningitis Belt: a collection of 26 countries from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east. These countries experience the highest burden of disease and are at increased risk of meningitis epidemics.

Each year, around half of all meningitis cases and deaths occur in this region.



### How was the research conducted?

Information was collected using an online questionnaire. Respondents were asked to share information about their organisation, communication tools and materials, key messaging, audiences and barriers to their work.



### Who responded to the questionnaire?

Invitations were sent to UNICEF offices across the Meningitis Belt, members of the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO) and other organisations involved in defeating meningitis in the region.

25 responses were collected in total. Respondents were encouraged to consult with partners and colleagues before submitting answers. Overall, 36 additional people were consulted, including government officials, WHO colleagues, non-governmental organisations and medical professionals.

Responses were received from 16 out of the 26 countries in the Meningitis Belt (62% coverage).



### What are the key findings?

1. Lack of funding for communications activities is a consistent challenge.
2. Limited materials exist to raise awareness about meningitis (i.e., signs and symptoms).
3. There is low awareness of meningitis and vaccines among several key audiences.
4. International events, like World Meningitis Day, are critical to raising awareness.
5. Radio and television are the most popular channels for meningitis communications.
6. Organisations don't always have social media policies in place to support awareness-raising activities.
7. Many countries do not have risk communications plans, which are critical when responding to meningitis outbreaks and epidemics.



### What next?

The findings of this report have been developed into practical tools for use in the region, including a communication framework that identifies different audiences, key messages and the channels to reach them.



Read the report here.

#DefeatMeningitis

meningitis.org

