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Update on the WHO Global Roadmap to Defeat Meningitis by 2030

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In 2017, representatives from governments, public health organizations, academia, the private sector and civil society called for a global vision to defeat meningitis. Representatives from all countries of the African meningitis belt amplified this call, highlighting the need for equitable and sustainable access to meningitis vaccines. WHO took up the call to action and, together with its global partners and experts involved in meningitis prevention and control, developed a roadmap to defeat meningitis by 2030. Broad public and expert consultations took place through 2019.

This first global roadmap on meningitis sets a path to tackle the main causes of acute bacterial meningitis (meningococcus, pneumococcus, Haemophilus influenzae and group B streptococcus). The three visionary goals are to (i) eliminate bacterial meningitis epidemics, (ii) reduce cases and deaths from vaccine-preventable bacterial meningitis and (iii) reduce disability and improve quality of life after meningitis due to any cause. To achieve these, strategic goals, key activities and milestones are set out in five interconnected pillars: Prevention and epidemic control, Diagnosis and treatment, Disease surveillance, Support and care for people affected by meningitis, Advocacy and engagement. For prevention and epidemic control, the drive for action is expanding coverage of existing vaccines, development of new vaccines, improved prevention strategies and response to epidemics. For diagnosis and treatment, the focus is on the rapid confirmation of meningitis and optimal care. Improved global surveillance based on effective national surveillance systems is needed to guide meningitis prevention and control measures, document the impact of vaccines and improve estimation of disease burden including aftereffects. For care and support of those affected by meningitis, the focus is on early recognition and improved management of after-effects, on availability of support and access to care. For advocacy and engagement, the drive is to ensure that the roadmap is integrated into country plans, that there is high population awareness of meningitis and its impact, of the right to meningitis prevention and care, with increased demand for vaccines and after-care services.

In September 2019, over 110 representatives, from ministries of health, government agencies, pharmaceutical companies, non-governmental and civil society organizations, academia, funding agencies, UNICEF and WHO, met to finalize the shared strategy. Participants, from 29 countries and all regions of the world, called for urgent global action against meningitis, emphasised the timeliness of setting a global agenda and pledged their commitment to the success of the roadmap. In October 2019, the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization confirmed their support to the approach and that the meningitis strategy will transform their recommendations into reality.

The meningitis roadmap is an essential component of achieving Universal Health Coverage and a powerful lever, integrated with other initiatives, to drive progress to strengthen Primary Health Care, immunization programmes, antimicrobial resistance; improve control of infectious diseases, global health security and access to disability support. Member States voiced their intent to submit a resolution on meningitis to the World Health Assembly for endorsement by its 194 member states. Regional Implementation Frameworks will translate the strategy into concrete steps.