

WHO launches first-ever implementation handbook to accelerate country action on hepatitis elimination

The World Health Organization (WHO) released landmark Consolidated guidance and implementation handbook on hepatitis B and C, to support countries to expand prevention, testing, treatment, service delivery and programme monitoring, through a comprehensive public health approach.

Marking 10 years since the adoption of WHO's first Global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis, the handbook brings together more than a decade of WHO evidence-based recommendations on viral hepatitis into a single, practical reference for programme managers, policymakers, clinicians, donors and partners. It provides clear operational guidance in one place to translate normative recommendations into action. It also supports the integration of hepatitis services within primary health care and universal health coverage platforms.

Viral hepatitis remains a major health challenge. WHO estimates that 254 million people are living with hepatitis B and 50 million with hepatitis C. In 2022, hepatitis related cirrhosis and liver cancer caused 1.3 million deaths- equivalent to more than 3500 deaths each day - making hepatitis B and C among the leading infectious diseases worldwide with rising mortality. This underscores the urgent need to take action now and accelerate progress towards the 2030 hepatitis elimination goal.

Despite the availability of highly effective tools for prevention, testing and treatment – including a cure for hepatitis C and a vaccine and effective treatment for hepatitis B – viral hepatitis continues to cause substantial preventable morbidity and mortality from liver cirrhosis and hepatocellular cancer.

“With this first-of-its-kind handbook, WHO is supporting countries to move from evidence-based recommendations to concrete action – reducing new hepatitis infections and combating rising mortality,” said Dr Tereza Kasaeva, Director of WHO's Department for HIV, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted Infections. “The handbook provides clear implementation pathways to expand equitable, person-centred hepatitis services at all levels of the health system. It is an essential resource for strengthening national responses and achieving the 2030 global target of hepatitis elimination.”

The handbook:

Consolidates more than 80 WHO evidence-informed recommendations on hepatitis B, C, and D (2015–2025) into a single, streamlined, modular resource.

Provides practical guidance on prevention of mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B, including hepatitis B birth dose vaccination, and other prevention interventions, such as blood and injection safety and harm reduction services for people who inject drugs.

Outlines prioritized public health approaches to testing for hepatitis B, C and D, including the use of point-of-care and reflex testing, and provide guidance on simplified treatment approaches suitable for implementation across different levels of care.

Emphasizes the central role of primary health care in national hepatitis responses and provides a framework for integrating hepatitis services within primary care settings.

Supports the establishment of person-centered data monitoring systems and includes practical tools to strengthen programme performance and accountability.

WHO is working with countries and partners to scale uptake of this new handbook to ensure equitable, integrated and person-centred hepatitis services and to accelerate progress towards elimination by 2030.

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