

Hepatitis B and C in the Americas

What is hepatitis?

An inflammation of the liver most commonly caused by hepatitis virus. There are five types (A, B, C, D and E) that can cause acute or chronic infections and liver inflammation that can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and sometimes death.

Situation

Viral hepatitis claims many lives and puts a heavy burden on communities and health systems. Some **1.4 million** people worldwide die every year from acute infections, liver cancer or cirrhosis associated with hepatitis, similar to the number of deaths from HIV and tuberculosis.

In the Americas, more than **125,000** deaths each year are associated with viral hepatitis, **99%** of them due to hepatitis B and C.

Hepatitis B

- Transmitted through contact with infected blood or unprotected sex, including oral sex, and through blood transfusions, organ transplants, injections or tattoos using contaminated needles, or from mother to child.
- In the Americas an estimated **2.8 million** people are living with hepatitis B, 2.1 million of them in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- An estimated **88,000** new hepatitis B infections are expected in the region by 2016, along with **10,000** new cases of chronic hepatitis B (56% of them transmitted from mother to child during birth).
- Vaccination during the first **24 hours** of birth prevents transmission of hepatitis B from mother to child.
- Health services should ensure coverage with **3 doses** of hepatitis B vaccine for all children under 1.
- All countries and territories in the Americas have hepatitis B vaccines in their routine schedules for children under 1, and coverage in 2015 was 89%.
- 21 countries and territories in the Americas recommend universal hepatitis B vaccination of newborns, and 15 countries and territories recommend the vaccine for children born to mothers with the disease.

Hepatitis C

- Transmitted through contact with infected blood, through blood transfusions, organ transplants, injections or tattoos using contaminated needles, and less commonly through unprotected sex or from mother to child.
- An estimated **7.2 million** people are living with hepatitis C in the Americas, 4.1 million of them in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Only **25%** of those with chronic hepatitis C—about 1.8 million regionwide—have been diagnosed, and only **300,000** are receiving treatment.
- Each year an estimated **65,000** people in the Americas become newly infected with hepatitis C.
- Over **90%** of people with hepatitis C can be cured of the virus if given appropriate treatment, reducing the risk of death from liver cancer or cirrhosis.

What is PAHO/WHO doing?

- PAHO/WHO is supporting countries' efforts to improve surveillance and information systems for viral hepatitis and to establish plans and programs to address hepatitis prevention and treatment in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- PAHO/WHO is also promoting integrated prevention, control, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of all hepatitis viruses.

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