



Key data

- Trachoma is one of the oldest infectious diseases known to man. It is caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*, which is transmitted through contact with the ocular secretions of infected people (shared use of towels and handkerchiefs, contact with fingers, etc.), as well as by flies that help spread it. After years of repeated infection, the inside of the eyelid can become so severely scarred that it turns inward and causes the eyelashes to rub against the eyeball, damaging the cornea (front of the eye). If it is not treated, this condition leads to irreversible corneal opacity and blindness.
- Globally, trachoma is known as a public health problem in 42 countries and is responsible for blindness and visual disability in nearly 1.9 million people. Nearly 182 million people live in areas endemic for trachoma and are at risk of blindness. It causes about 1.4% of all blindness worldwide. Trachoma is one of the leading infectious causes of preventable blindness and is hyperendemic in many of the rural, poor, and remote areas of countries in Africa, Asia, Australia, Central and South America, and the Middle East.
- In hyperendemic regions, the active disease (follicular trachoma) is common in pre-school aged children, with prevalence rates ranging from 60 to 90%. It affects women and children the most, and adult women have a higher risk of developing blinding trachoma than men because they have more frequent contact with infected children.
- In the Region of the Americas, there is evidence of trachoma, including trachoma-caused blindness, in three countries (Brazil, Colombia, and Guatemala), and it is estimated that up to 5 million people are at risk of contracting the disease.
- In 2017, Mexico received validation from WHO for having eliminated trachoma as a public health problem, the first country in the Region to reach this goal.
- Interventions to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem include improvement of basic sanitation, access to clean water, and better facial hygiene in at-risk children. The infection can be treated through the annual mass administration of antibiotics in high prevalence areas (>10% of follicular trachoma). The chronic disease (trachomatous trichiasis) that leads to vision loss can be corrected through surgery.

PAHO/WHO's response

- In 1997, WHO launched the [SAFE strategy](#) (Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial Cleanliness and Environmental Improvement), which consists of surgery to treat advanced trachoma (trichiasis), antibiotics (azithromycin) to clear the *C. trachomatis* infection, facial hygiene, and environmental improvements to reduce the transmission of *C. trachomatis* from one person to another.
- In 1998, the World Health Assembly adopted [Resolution WHA51.11](#), which is aimed at eliminating new cases of blindness and visual disability caused by trachoma, and in 2013 it adopted [Resolution WHA66.12](#), which urges Member States to implement interventions to fight neglected tropical diseases (including trachoma) and achieve the goals set in the [road map](#) for these diseases.
- In 2009, the PAHO/WHO Directing Council adopted [Resolution CD49.R19](#) on the elimination of neglected infectious diseases and other poverty-related infections, which set the objective of eliminating new cases of blinding trachoma by the year 2015, by reducing the prevalence of trachomatous trichiasis to less than 1 case per 1,000 people and the prevalence of follicular trachoma to less than 5% in children aged 1-9 years. In 2013, the Organization of American States-OAS approved Resolution [AG/RES.2810\(XLIII-O/13\)](#) endorsing the provisions of PAHO/WHO Resolution CD49.R19.
- Regional Meetings of Directors of Trachoma Programs in the Region of the Americas were held in [May 2011](#), [April 2012](#) (Spanish only), [August 2014](#) and August 2016, for the purpose of evaluating the progress made by the four countries toward elimination, and prioritizing the lines of action required to achieve the targets set for 2020.
- In 2016, the PAHO/WHO Directing Council adopted Resolution [CD55.R9](#) aimed at implementing a plan for the elimination of neglected infectious diseases, including trachoma.