



Message from

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on the occasion of
World Hepatitis Day
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It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean today on the occasion of World Hepatitis Day 2015. The holding of this global event here in our Region is a great opportunity for us to remind ourselves of our collective aim and responsibility to end the suffering of people in the Region and in the world as a whole from hepatitis B and C. I am pleased to welcome His Excellency Dr Adel Hassan Adawi, Minister of Health of Egypt here today, as well as Mr Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance.

Our Region is among the regions most affected by hepatitis in the world. Every year, around 4.3 million people are infected with hepatitis B virus and 800 000 people with hepatitis C virus. Around 17 million people in the Region currently suffer from chronic hepatitis C. Viral hepatitis has long been neglected. Yet, hepatitis B and C are preventable, hepatitis B is manageable and hepatitis C is curable. People are suffering unnecessarily and we are losing lives unnecessarily. This suffering and loss of life must stop.

Unfortunately, many people in our Region still acquire the infection in health care settings, through unsafe injections, as well as through unscreened blood transfusions. Mother-to-child transmission is the main cause of hepatitis among children. Furthermore, many people who are at risk of HIV are also at risk of hepatitis B and C infections, due to unsafe sexual relations or due to injecting drug use. Yet, we have a wealth of evidence on how these transmissions can be prevented.

“Prevent hepatitis B and C” is the theme of this year’s World Hepatitis Day. We must do this together.

Together we will stand up for the challenge to ensure that health care is safe and that people are informed about infection, transmission and prevention. We will work to ensure that newborn infants and adults at risk are vaccinated against hepatitis. And we will work to ensure that harm reduction services are available and accessible for people who inject drugs, and that people have easy access to means for preventing the sexual transmission of hepatitis.

We have missed past opportunities. We have a long way to go. However, we are now on the right path.

For the first time ever, WHO is developing a global health sector response strategy for hepatitis. This strategy will increase political commitment and set the framework for concerted global action to eliminate hepatitis by 2030.

WHO and partners are working to improve access to quality, affordable medicines and laboratory technologies.

In October last year, a technical session on hepatitis was held on the day preceding the Sixty-first Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. The session raised awareness of new opportunities for scaling up national efforts to prevent and control viral hepatitis B and C.

Last month, the Regional Office convened a meeting that brought together national focal points on viral hepatitis, regional experts, partner organizations and participants representing civil society organizations to provide regionally

specific feedback on the global hepatitis strategy and to discuss ways to develop and strengthen national hepatitis responses.

The Regional Office is in process of developing a regional framework to support Member States develop national multisectoral plans.

We urge countries to make the most of the new opportunities and rising global momentum to develop and implement a strong hepatitis response. WHO remains committed to supporting countries reach the ambitious prevention and treatment targets of the global strategy that are also enshrined in universal coverage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the leadership and progress being made in Egypt in its provision of treatment for hepatitis C, and its commitment to dealing with the problem across its population. I would like to congratulate His Excellency Dr Adel Adawi on the progress being made to the lives of people living with hepatitis C in Egypt. I look forward to benefiting from Egypt's experience in order to set an example for other countries in the Region in hepatitis treatment and control.

In closing, I would also like to address our colleagues in the Member States to assure you of WHO's commitment to supporting you all in your journey to set up and implement hepatitis control programmes.

Thank you