Defeating bacterial meningitis by 2030

The challenge

Meningitis remains a universal public health challenge in countries around the world – cases and outbreaks are highly dreaded. The global number of deaths due to meningitis was estimated at 380,000 annually.¹ Deaths from meningitis and sepsis in children under the age of five were estimated to be as high as deaths due to malaria, not accounting the devastation from sequelae.

The call for action

In May 2017, over 50 representatives from governments, global health organizations, public health bodies, academia, private sector and civil society called for a global vision to defeat meningitis by 2030. In September 2017, another 200 representatives from 26 African countries gathered in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso urging for the establishment of a global commitment and the implementation of urgent actions for equitable and sustainable access to meningitis vaccines.

The opportunity

The global fight against meningitis is fully aligned with WHO’s new 13th General Programme of Work and captures the essence of WHO three-fold mission:

- Promote health
- Keep the world safe
- Serve the vulnerable

• Meningitis is a largely vaccine-preventable disease, and it can be further prevented with the advent of new vaccines;
• Meningitis is an epidemic-prone disease, and as such deserves special attention given the potentially major impact on health systems, the economy and society as a whole due to the disruptive nature of meningitis outbreaks which are costly and challenging to control.

The countries in the African and East-Mediterranean Regions are committed to the global effort to control bacterial meningitis.

The business case for WHO immunization activities on the African continent 2018-2030, spearheaded by both regions and launched at the 71st World Health Assembly in 2018, is an ideal framework to champion meningitis control, building on the success of regional new vaccine introductions and the elimination of meningitis A epidemics.

The way forward

Developing a strategic global meningitis control roadmap (2018-2020)

Over the next two years, WHO will coordinate the development of a global roadmap that sets a vision, provides a high-level overview and communicates direction, outlining priority areas for research and enhanced control activities, with goals and specific solutions to meet the desired milestones.

The scope of the roadmap will be global, with strategic goals, milestones and research priority activities tailored to each region. The main bacterial pathogens considered will include Streptococcus pneumoniae, Neisseria meningitidis and Streptococcus agalactiae (Group B).

Building a partner coalition will be a cornerstone of the roadmap development strategy and endorsement.

• A Technical Task Force, convening major technical partners historically engaged in meningitis control, including but not limited to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Meningitis Research Foundation, Médecins sans Frontières, PATH, UNICEF and WHO.

• A Strategy Support Group, constituted of highly committed global level sponsors, to enable and champion the roadmap development.

• The WHO Regional Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (RITAG) and Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunization will provide guidance prior to submission of resolutions to the WHO Regional Committees (RC) and the World Health Assembly.

Defeating meningitis by 2030: a multi-fold roadmap

In the coming years, efficient collaboration and coordination is key to sustain and build on the outstanding meningitis achievements of the last two decades as we move towards meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

Together, we can defeat bacterial meningitis

- Engage civil societies and communities
- Address country priorities through evidence to policy and impact
- Detect meningitis epidemics through strengthened surveillance
- Control meningitis epidemics
- Preserve human capital by preventing and treating meningitis sequelae
- Strong immunization programmes
- Increased access to care and meningitis treatment

Promote and connect R&D to regulatory and policy to enable global access to diagnostics, medicines and vaccines