

PRESS RELEASE

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New data shows that one person dies every 30 seconds from viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific, a death rate three times as high as HIV/AIDS.

On World Hepatitis Day, CEVHAP members are asking governments to embrace the WHO's new Global Framework for Action to halt the death toll and save the lives of one million people that die every year from viral hepatitis across Asia Pacific

Singapore (Friday 26 July 2013) – The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) is today asking governments to urgently step-up their efforts to combat viral hepatitis, as new data shows that one person dies every 30 seconds in the Asia Pacific region, a death rate that is three times as high as HIV/AIDS.¹

The call for action comes as CEVHAP marks the first World Hepatitis Day since new figures were announced on 7 June 2013, revealing the shocking fact that the number of people dying from viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific has reached one million every year, up from 695,000 in 1990.¹

“These new figures reveal the increasing threat posed by viral hepatitis to the Asia Pacific region and are symptomatic of the poor understanding and lack of political commitment that has typically surrounded these diseases in many countries,” said Professor Ding-Shinn Chen, Immediate Past Dean of the National Taiwan University College of Medicine and Chair of CEVHAP. “A comprehensive effort from governments is urgently needed if we are to curb the shocking death toll and prevent millions of new infections.”

The new mortality figures are from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, who together with its consortium of partners, conducted the Global Burden of Disease Study (GBDS). This study aimed to produce new estimates measuring the impact of hundreds of diseases, injuries, and risk factors across 21 regions around the world. Initial results from the study were published in *The Lancet* in December 2012, but the mortality figures for all forms of viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific were only made publically available in June 2013.

Viral hepatitis refers to a group of diseases caused by infection from one of five viruses – hepatitis A, B, C, D and E. Hepatitis B and C contribute the largest overall disease burden of all forms of hepatitis, with 500 million people worldwide living with chronic hepatitis B or C.² There are 350 million people living with chronic hepatitis B alone and 74% of these people live in Asia Pacific.²

Globally viral hepatitis kills 1.4 million people each year, a figure similar to the number of deaths caused by HIV/AIDS.¹ When looking at Asia Pacific the situation is even starker, with approximately one million deaths from viral hepatitis each year, compared with 300,000 from HIV/AIDS.¹

“Despite the escalating death toll from viral hepatitis, governments have often been at a loss about how to tackle these diseases, lacking the technical expertise, resources and even evidence to justify the investments needed to confront viral hepatitis,” said Professor Darrell Crawford, Acting Dean, School of Medicine at the University of Queensland and Joint Secretary of CEVHAP. “We now have the evidence that justifies the investment in the form of one million people dying needlessly every year. We also have a new framework from the World Health Organization and as a member of CEVHAP I urge all governments across the region to form national strategies and ensure viral hepatitis receives the attention it needs.”

In July 2012, the World Health Organization’s (WHO’s) Global Hepatitis Programme launched a major new Framework for Global Action as a blueprint for governments to develop their own national strategies to tackle viral hepatitis. The framework was launched in response to the WHO resolution on viral hepatitis (WHA63 R18), ratified by the World Health Assembly in May 2010, which called for governments to incorporate specific policies, strategies and tools to address the significant mortality and disease burden relating to viral hepatitis. WHO’s Framework for the Prevention and Control of Viral hepatitis is focused on four distinct axes:

- Axis 1: Raising awareness, promoting partnerships and mobilizing resources
- Axis 2: Evidence-based policy and data for action
- Axis 3: Prevention of transmission
- Axis 4: Screening, care and treatment

“We have a vaccine for hepatitis B and new treatments for chronic hepatitis C that could save millions of lives, but none of these matter if governments fail to tackle viral hepatitis in a more comprehensive way,” explained Professor Stephen Locarnini, Director of the WHO Regional Reference Laboratory for Hepatitis B at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) and Joint Secretary of CEVHAP. “What we need is for governments across the region to approach viral hepatitis in the same way that most have HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria. This starts with the development of a national action plan and our expert members are ready and willing to help governments in the development of these, following the blueprint provided by WHO.”

About CEVHAP

The Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP) is the first organization of its kind in the region, established as an independent, multidisciplinary body to advocate for public policy reform to reduce the burden of and ultimately eliminate viral hepatitis in Asia Pacific.

Incorporated in October 2010, CEVHAP membership is comprised of many world-renowned hepatitis experts, including people living with the infections, utilizing the collective expertise of its members to assist the region through partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, including government bodies in public policy formation and health education. For more information, please visit www.cevhap.org

World Hepatitis Day 2013 in Asia Pacific

The sixth annual World Hepatitis Day will take place on Sunday 28th July 2013, as part of an ongoing campaign launched by the World Hepatitis Alliance in 2008. This is the third year that CEVHAP has helped support and coordinate World Hepatitis Day in Asia Pacific and also the third year that the WHO has endorsed World Hepatitis Day.

In Asia Pacific, CEVHAP's members across Asia Pacific will be coordinating a wide range of events and activities to mark World Hepatitis Day.

Global Response to Viral Hepatitis

In May 2010 the World Health Assembly ratified a resolution on viral hepatitis (WHA63 R18), the first time such a resolution had been agreed by the world's foremost health authority. In response to WHA63.18, the WHO established a Global Hepatitis Programme within its Department of Pandemic and Epidemic Diseases, with focal points in its six Regional Offices. The Global Hepatitis Programme published a Framework for Global Action in 2012 as a blueprint for WHO member states to develop their own national strategies. Built around four distinct axes, the implementation of this framework can contribute to major and sustained improvements in health.

In June 2013 CEVHAP hosted members of the WHO's Global Hepatitis Programme at APASL Liver Week 2013 as they launched the Global Hepatitis Network, a new initiative that aims to build capacity and strengthen national, regional and global action to tackle viral hepatitis. Further information regarding the Global Hepatitis Programme, Framework and Network can be found here: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/en/>

References:

1. Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Global Burden of Disease Study 2010. 2013. Available: <http://www.healthmetricsandevaluation.org/gbd> (data on file).
2. World Health Organization. Prevention & Control of Viral Hepatitis Infection: Framework for Global Action. 2012. Available: <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/hepatitis/Framework/en/index.html>

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