

Press Release

World Health Assembly Forced to Postpone Decision on Viral Hepatitis

Global epidemic kills one person every 30 seconds and one million people will die before the World Health Assembly meets again in 2010

Switzerland, Geneva. Monday 18 May, 2009 – Ahead of the second annual World Hepatitis Day, the World Hepatitis Alliance today called on governments not to forget the plight of 500 million people living with hepatitis B and C, as the World Health Assembly postpones discussion of a World Health Organization (WHO) resolution on viral hepatitis - one of the biggest threats to global health.

The 62nd World Health Assembly, starting in Geneva on 18 May, has been shortened in response to the global efforts required to tackle H1N1 influenza. As a result a scheduled resolution on viral hepatitis, submitted by Brazil and entitled '*Proposal for the Establishment of a World Day for the Struggle against Viral Hepatitis and other issues relating to the Disease*', which calls for action to improve hepatitis awareness, diagnosis, prevention, treatment and support will now not be discussed until 2010 at the earliest.

Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance explained that the hepatitis community recognised the need for a concerted effort to tackle H1N1 influenza, but stressed that global health leaders can no longer afford to ignore hepatitis B and C. "Viral hepatitis has never been properly addressed at a global level and the consequences have been disastrous" commented Mr Gore. "Despite this disappointing postponement, we look forward to working with both the WHO Executive Board and governments around the world to ensure that a resolution is passed in 2010 and that a comprehensive, coordinated approach is adopted before another million people die."

Chronic viral hepatitis B and C affects one in 12 people globally and approximately one person dies every 30 seconds, meaning that one million people will die before the World Health Assembly next meets in 2010. Since the hepatitis B and C viruses were first discovered in 1967 and 1988 respectively, there has not been a single WHO resolution that fully addresses the challenges of the global epidemic.

19 May marks the second World Hepatitis Day, and over 200 patient groups from more than 50 countries have been recognising the day by asking the question 'Am I Number 12?' – an awareness raising campaign aimed at highlighting the shocking statistic that one in 12 people worldwide are living with either chronic hepatitis B or chronic hepatitis C. While this is far higher than the prevalence of HIV or any cancer, awareness is inexplicably low and the majority of those infected are unaware.

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Did You Know?

- Approximately 500 million people worldwide are currently infected with hepatitis B or C¹
- This is over 10 times the number infected with HIV/AIDS²
- Between them, hepatitis B and C kill one million people a year¹
- One in every three people on the planet has been exposed to either or both viruses
- Most of the 500 million infected do not know

Messages of Support for the World Hepatitis Alliance

Please contact contact@worldhepatitisalliance.org for quotes expressing support for World Hepatitis Day from:

- Dr. Michael Houghton, co-discoverer of the hepatitis C virus
- Prof. Baruch Blumberg, Nobel Laureate, co-discoverer of the hepatitis B virus and co-inventor of the hepatitis B vaccine
- Prof. Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Laureate and global Economist

World Hepatitis Alliance

The World Hepatitis Alliance provides global leadership and supports action that will halt the death toll and improve the lives of people living with chronic viral hepatitis B and C. Through better awareness, prevention, care, support and access to treatment, our ultimate goal is to work with governments to eradicate these diseases from the planet.

The World Hepatitis Alliance is a Non-Governmental Organisation representing more than 200 hepatitis B and C patient groups from around the world. The World Hepatitis Alliance is governed by a representative board elected by patient groups from seven world regions: Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, North America, South America, Australasia and Western Pacific. For further information visit:

www.worldhepatitisday.org

World Hepatitis Alliance – Seeking a world without viral hepatitis B and C.

World Hepatitis Day

The second annual World Hepatitis Day will take place on Tuesday 19 May 2009, as part of an ongoing campaign launched by the World Hepatitis Alliance in 2008. An entirely patient-led initiative, World

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Hepatitis Day in 2009 aims to raise awareness of hepatitis B and C, as well as extend the political support for the diseases to levels seen in HIV / AIDS, TB and malaria. The long-term objective of the World Hepatitis Day Campaign is to prevent new infections and to deliver real improvements in health outcomes for people living with hepatitis B and C. The campaign theme for 2009 is 'Am I Number 12?' - designed to communicate the shocking statistic that one in 12 people worldwide are living with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C.

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References

¹World Health Organization. Viral hepatitis: Report by the Secretariat. http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/A62/A62_22-en.pdf (accessed May 11, 2009)

²World Health Organization. Global summary of the AIDS epidemic. http://www.who.int/hiv/data/2008_global_summary_AIDS_ep.png (accessed May 11, 2009)