

Cryptococcal meningitis should be classified as a neglected tropical disease, researchers say

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Credit: St. George's University of London

Cryptococcal meningitis is a deadly invasive fungal infection which affects hundreds of thousands of HIV patients in the late stage of their

disease every year.

Attacking the tissues covering the brain and spinal cord, Cryptococcal meningitis is responsible for an estimated 15-20% of all AIDS-related deaths.

Yet it is one of the most poorly-funded diseases in the world, receiving just 0.2% of available relevant research and development investment.

It disproportionately affects populations in some of the poorest regions of the world, but it is not classified by the World Health Organisation as a 'neglected [tropical disease](#),' nor by other groups working in this field such as *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, an open access publishing and advocacy group.

Inclusion in the WHO's list of neglected tropical diseases would enable this infection to be eligible for WHO health programs aimed at eradicating diseases.

Now a new research paper: "Cryptococcal meningitis; A neglected tropical disease?" argues that cryptococcal meningitis meets all the criteria for inclusion on the WHO list.

The WHO says neglected tropical diseases are 'a proxy for poverty and disadvantage'; have 'an important impact on morbidity and mortality'; and are relatively 'neglected by research'. In the paper the researchers demonstrate that all these criteria are fulfilled.

Dr Síle Molloy, an Epidemiologist, and Dr Angela Loyse, based at St George's, University of London, are the principal authors of the report.

They explained: "A common misconception is that funding for [cryptococcal meningitis](#) comes under the umbrella of HIV.

"In reality it has fallen into a research and policy gap. There are only three drug treatments, all of which are decades old and two of which are regularly unavailable. Meanwhile R&D into the manufacture of new therapies is inadequate."

More information: Síle F. Molloy et al. Cryptococcal meningitis: A neglected NTD?, *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pntd.0005575](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0005575)

Provided by St. George's University of London

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