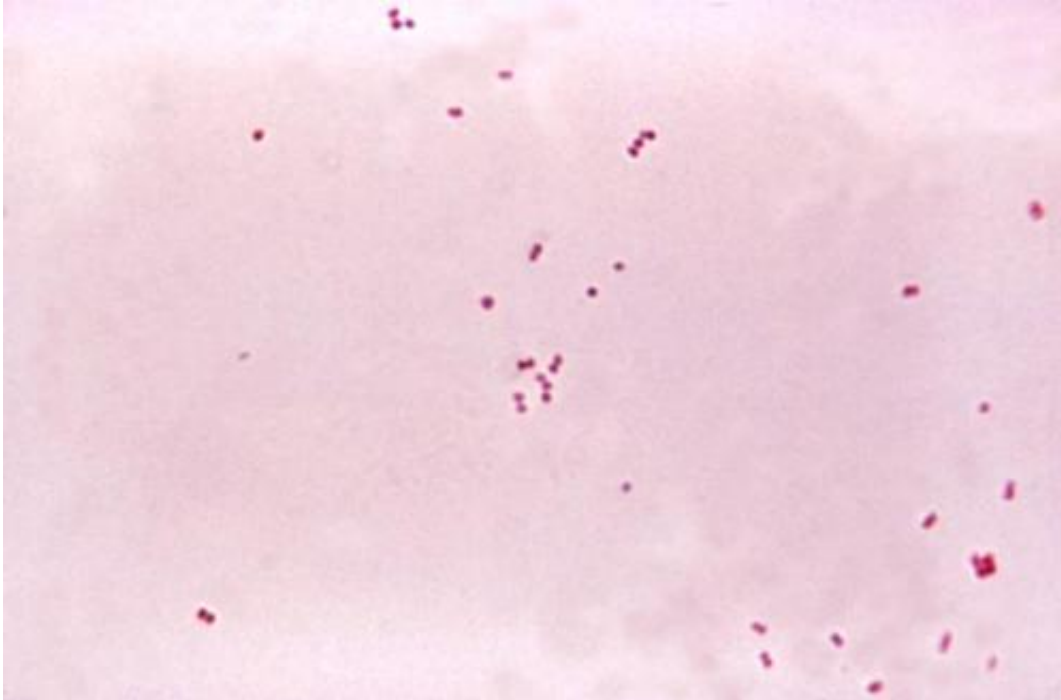


WHO wants to rein in meningitis by 2030

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Gram stain of meningococci from a culture showing Gram negative (pink) bacteria, often in pairs. Credit: public domain

The World Health Organization unveiled a plan Tuesday to bring meningitis under control by 2030, slashing the 250,000 annual deaths caused by the debilitating disease.

Launching the first-ever global strategy to tackle the illness, the WHO said it wanted to eliminate epidemics of bacterial meningitis—the most deadly form.

By doing so, it hopes to halve the number of cases and reduce deaths by 70 percent. It also wants to significantly reduce disability caused by the disease.

"Wherever it occurs, meningitis can be deadly and debilitating; it strikes quickly, has serious health, economic and social consequences, and causes devastating outbreaks," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"It is time to tackle meningitis globally once and for all—by urgently expanding access to existing tools like vaccines, spearheading new research and innovation to prevent, detect and treat the various causes of the disease, and improve rehabilitation for those affected."

Meningitis is a dangerous inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord, predominantly caused by infection with bacteria, and other pathogens including viruses and fungi.

Meningitis caused by bacterial infection tends to be the most serious form as it can spark fast-spreading epidemics.

It kills one in 10 of those infected—mostly children and [young people](#).

It also leaves one in five with long-lasting disability, such as seizures, hearing and [vision loss](#), neurological damage and [cognitive impairment](#).

Over the last 10 years, epidemics have most commonly occurred in the so-called "Meningitis Belt", spanning 26 countries across sub-Saharan Africa from Senegal to Ethiopia.

Outbreaks can severely disrupt [health systems](#) and create vast expenditures for households and communities.

The WHO said there was an "urgent need for innovation, funding and research to develop more meningitis-preventive vaccines".

Several vaccines protect against certain meningitis types, but many countries are yet to introduce them into their national immunisation programmes.

Research is also under way to develop vaccines for other causes of meningitis, such as Group B Strep bacteria.

The WHO's Global Roadmap to Defeat Meningitis by 2030 called for high immunisation coverage and improved strategies to prevent outbreaks and respond to them.

It also called for efforts to strengthen [early diagnosis](#), treatment and rehabilitation.

The plan says meningitis will not be eliminated but it aims to get as close to that point as possible by reducing case numbers and then keeping them low.

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