

Press Release

We Can All #DefeatMeningitis – World Meningitis Day 2020

Join the map of pledges and actions at: comomeningitis.org/world-meningitis-day

This World Meningitis Day, CoMO, its members and collaborators call on the global community to help #DefeatMeningitis. Meningitis is an infectious disease that can cause permanent disability or death within 24 hours. Prevention is more important now than ever and key to saving lives and reducing the burden on overwhelmed healthcare systems worldwide. Several experts are available to speak with the media.

Globally, almost 300,000 deaths were caused by meningitis in 2017 alone and an estimated 5 million new cases occur every year. For those who survive, life doesn't just bounce back, with 10-20% of survivors experiencing a range of life-changing after effects that may include brain injury, depression, hearing loss, and/or limb loss for those who also contract sepsis. Cases are particularly high in Sub-Saharan Africa; however, outbreaks occur worldwide. Invasive meningococcal disease (or IMD) continues to be endemic in countries like Australia, the UK, US, and Canada, despite being a vaccine-preventable disease. Meningitis is a global problem that requires a coordinated, global solution, especially as we become acutely aware of how easily diseases spread across borders.

In good news, the World Health Organization (WHO) is considering a draft plan to defeat meningitis by 2030. This exciting plan provides clear actionable steps to make meningitis a disease of the past and is the culmination of work driven by the voices of people affected. "All the people affected each year by this deadly disease know all too well how rapidly meningitis can change your life forever and why we must therefore defeat it. Their determination that no one else should have to face meningitis drives the global awareness campaign World Meningitis Day because we all need to be aware of how to protect ourselves." – Chris Head, President of CoMO

The current coronavirus pandemic and the struggle to quickly find preventative options highlights the amazing yet underappreciated role vaccines play in ensuring we can freely live our lives without fear of being struck down by a dangerous disease. Curbing the spread of infectious diseases relies on everyone to protect their own health and the health of people within their community. Fortunately, everyone can help defeat meningitis and protect themselves as many of the most prevalent types are preventable with the help of rigorously tested vaccines.

For those confined to their homes and unable to be immunised at this time, there is still plenty that can be done to be a public health hero. As meningitis is so quick to develop and can kill in hours, learning the signs and symptoms is important so urgent medical attention can be sought if needed.

Furthermore, with so many people affected by meningitis each year and having to cope with major life changes – whether that's an impairment, bereavement or stress - talking about how to improve accessibility and support is also necessary and yet can be done by anyone willing to listen to people affected. Simple conversations can be had today that help save a life tomorrow.

The creation of a draft WHO plan and the importance of avoiding the resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases in the current climate highlight why we must act now. As policymakers worldwide are learning more about the many long-term impacts of meningitis, we all have an amazing opportunity to commit to a small action and see this disease defeated within ten years. Join us as we

build a global community of people and organisations who recognise the importance of meningitis prevention. Anyone can contract meningitis but we can all #DefeatMeningitis

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

"Despite popular misconceptions, meningitis can affect people of all age groups, even older adults. Older adults infected with meningitis often face serious and life-altering consequences, including a rapid decline in functional ability, and even death. Vaccination throughout life is the only action to reduce rates of infection and enable all citizens to participate in that which they value." - Dr Jane Barratt, Secretary General, IFA

Immunize Canada

"Meningococcal disease is a rare but serious infection with potentially devastating complications. Children, adolescents, young adults and seniors, and people with compromised immune systems are most at risk of serious illness from the spread of meningococcal disease. Immunization is a safe and effective way of protecting them from illness, but everyone in between must be up to date on their immunizations too. It may be difficult to wade through the immense volume of information about vaccines, but a registered health provider is the best source of information. In our busy interconnected world, the best way to protect yourself and the people around you is to get immunized." - Dr. Anne Pham-Huy, Chair of Immunize Canada and a physician specializing in infectious diseases at CHEO, a pediatric hospital and research centre in Ottawa, Ontario

We know everyone's actions count in the fight to defeat meningitis, which is why you can log any action, big or small, on a World Meningitis Day map of pledges and actions. For more information about World Meningitis Day, please visit: www.comomeningitis.org/world-meningitis-day

Pledge your support for defeating meningitis and log your action: <https://meningitis.typeform.com/to/Ectcvk>

Learn the signs and symptoms of meningitis: <https://www.comomeningitis.org/symptoms>

Read the WHO draft plan: [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB146/B146\(6\)-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB146/B146(6)-en.pdf)

About the Organizations

The Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO) brings together healthcare professionals, healthcare experts, patient groups and meningitis survivors from over 30 countries worldwide. CoMO has coordinated World Meningitis Day since 2009 and has over 15 years of experience in supporting a global network of individuals and organisations committed to our vision of a world free from meningitis.

Please visit <http://www.comomeningitis.org/> to learn about CoMO, our work and resources. We can be found on social media at: <https://www.facebook.com/ConfederationOfMeningitisOrganisations/>, <https://twitter.com/COMOMeningitis> and <https://www.instagram.com/como.meningitis/>.

For any queries please direct them to info@comomeningitis.org or ring Nadia Vaenerberg at (+44) 0333 405 6264.

International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is an international non-governmental organization with a membership base comprising government, NGOs, academics, industry and individuals in 75 countries.

IFA's vision is a world of healthy older people whose rights and choices are both protected and respected.

For more information visit www.ifa.ngo and www.vaccines4life.com

Immunize Canada is a national coalition with a specific interest in promoting the understanding and use of vaccines as recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). For more information visit, <https://immunize.ca/>

Media contacts

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