Viral Hepatitis Deaths Increase Worldwide Despite Prevention Efforts

Chronic hepatitis B–related deaths increased by 17% since 2015, accounting for a majority of viral hepatitis deaths in 2024.

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The 2026 World Health Organization (WHO) Global Hepatitis Report found an increase in the number of viral hepatitis deaths in 2024 despite gains in hepatitis B vaccination and hepatitis C treatment. The report provides the first assessment of progress toward the WHO's 2030 viral hepatitis elimination target.

"[The report] identifies where countries are succeeding, where they are falling behind and where persistent gaps in prevention, testing, treatment, surveillance and programmatic reporting must be closed," wrote the core report team in a commentary published in The Lancet. "The tools required to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat already exist: The challenge now is to ensure that they reach the people and communities who need them most."

If left untreated, hepatitis C and B can lead to serious liver complications, including cirrhosis and liver cancer. There is no vaccine for HCV, but direct-acting antiviral therapy cures chronic hepatitis C in more than 95% of people who complete treatment, which typically takes two or three months. Vaccines can prevent HBV infection and its consequences. Antiviral treatment keeps HBV replication under control, but it seldom leads to a cure.

The WHO's 2030 viral hepatitis elimination goals include achieving a 90% reduction in new hepatitis B infections, an 80% reduction in new hepatitis C infections and a 65% reduction in deaths compared with a 2015 baseline.

"Perhaps the most alarming finding of the report is the high and rising burden of HBV-related mortality," wrote the core researchers.

The Global Hepatitis Report found a 32% drop in new hepatitis B infections. Hepatitis B among

children under five decreased to 0.6%, with 85 countries achieving or surpassing the 2030 target of 0.1%.

The report estimated 1.3 million deaths related to HBV and HCV in 2024, primarily due to cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma, the most common type of liver cancer. The estimate included 1.1 million deaths related to hepatitis B—an increase of 17% since 2015. Of an estimated 240 million living with chronic HBV in 2024, only 65 million (27%) had been diagnosed, and only 10 million were receiving antiviral treatment.

While HBV related deaths rose, HCV-related deaths declined by 12% since 2015, primarily due to improved treatment with direct-acting antivirals. Still, new diagnoses for HCV are not declining at a pace required to reach elimination targets.

“Looking toward 2030 and beyond, elimination of viral hepatitis will require a decisive shift from fragmented initiatives to scaled, integrated, decentralized service delivery at national and subnational levels,” wrote the report’s researchers. “Countries must embed hepatitis interventions within services for HIV, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, and noncommunicable diseases that are delivered as part of primary health care, using existing laboratories, supply chains, health workforces and financing mechanisms to improve sustainability and equity.”

To learn more about hepatitis among specific populations and countries, read “Efforts to Eliminate Hepatitis Deliver Gains but More Action Needed to Meet 2030 Targets.”

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