



Join the race to

2030

Supporting advocates in the race to defeat meningitis

The World Health Organization's guidelines on meningitis diagnosis, treatment and care

A summary for advocates

The World Health Organization's (WHO) new guidelines are **the first global recommendations for meningitis diagnosis, treatment and care.**

WHO guidelines are not binding, but act as evidence-based recommendations. Individual WHO member states (countries) are able to adopt, adapt or decide not to use recommendations. Different countries will take different approaches depending on their own national context and priorities for health. Find out more about WHO guidelines here: www.who.int/publications/who-guidelines.

The guidelines for meningitis address the diagnosis, treatment and long-term care of **acute-onset, community-acquired meningitis.** These are sudden, serious infections caused by bacteria or viruses. The guidelines specifically focus on infections spread in everyday settings (like schools or homes), not healthcare settings (like hospitals or clinics).

The places with the highest rates of meningitis are low- and lower middle-income countries, so the **guidelines have been particularly developed to work in low-resource settings.**



Who do the guidelines apply to?

The guidelines apply to the care of adults, adolescents and children aged more than 1 month. Separate guidelines already exist for **managing serious bacterial infections (including meningitis) in babies under a month old.**



Who should use the guidelines?

These are clinical guidelines which provide recommendations that are applicable worldwide. **They are developed for healthcare professionals** who support people who have, or have had, acute meningitis. Guidelines are highly technical.

The WHO hopes for the guidelines to inform technical work on meningitis for other people working on health, including **policy-makers and public health bodies.** They also aim to be a tool for research, teaching and capacity-building within academic institutions, non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations.



Why are they important?

The guidelines are an important step in the journey to defeat meningitis. They are the first-ever global guidelines for meningitis diagnosis, treatment and care.

The launch of the guidelines supports **a number of the WHO's strategic goals set out in the Global Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030**, including:

- **Strategic Goal 9:** Provide and implement appropriate, context-specific, quality-assured guidelines and tools for treatment and supportive care to reduce the risk of mortality, sequelae and antimicrobial resistance.
- **Strategic Goal 13:** Strengthen early recognition and management of sequelae from meningitis in health care and community settings.
- **Strategic Goal 17:** Ensure and raise awareness of communities about the impact of meningitis and available support after meningitis.

While **vaccination remains the best way to prevent meningitis**, it is hoped that the recommendations can help to improve diagnosis, treatment and care worldwide when people do develop meningitis. They provide another **tool in global efforts to raise awareness, increase understanding and reduce cases and deaths**.



Who developed the guidelines?

Guidelines were developed by WHO and supported by a number of stakeholder groups:

- **WHO Steering Group:** to guide and oversee the guideline development process. Made up of WHO staff members.
- **Guideline Development Group:** a diverse group with a wide range of relevant expertise in; clinical practice, research, health policy and guideline development and people with lived experience. WHO aimed to ensure that this group had a geographic and gender balance.

A number of teams were also used to review the guidelines. Members (external to WHO) were selected based on technical expertise, with consideration of gender, geography and country income level.



What's included?

The guidelines include recommendations for clinicians on:

- **Diagnosis**, including; lumbar punctures, cerebrospinal fluid investigations, blood investigations and cranial imaging (like CT scans).
- **Treatment**, including; general management of symptoms, use of antibiotics, use of corticosteroids, treatment of pressure in the skull, hydration, and management of seizures.
- **Management of after-effects**, including clinical assessment of after-effects and rehabilitation. The WHO has chosen for the guidelines to particularly focus on hearing loss.



How can advocates use them?

While the guidelines are primarily developed for technical audiences, they are still an important new advocacy tool.

We hope that the launch of the guidelines will increase awareness of the signs and symptoms of meningitis and enable increased opportunities for support and care for people living with the after-effects.

The guidelines could be a useful tool for advocates, for example:

- When speaking to ministries of health about national plans for meningitis, consider asking how the guidelines might be, or have been, used to inform your country's national plan.
- To use when developing materials, running events or training for people working in healthcare settings.
- To increase our own understanding of treatment, diagnosis and care pathways.

Find out more about meningitis in your country on the Meningitis Progress Tracker here:

<https://tracker.meningitis.org/my-country/>

What next?

The WHO plan to translate the recommendations into the six UN languages and share them amongst relevant audiences, working with WHO regional and country offices. They will then gather feedback to assess how useful and impactful the guidelines are.

The publication of these guidelines is **a critical step** in the journey to defeat meningitis. However, **guidelines alone are not enough**. We also need to continue advocacy for political prioritisation and funding to ensure that guidelines are implemented and that **recommendations reach those most at risk** in order to reduce preventable deaths and reduce the impact of after-effects on people who survive meningitis.

Join the Race to 2030

Are you a civil society organisation or activist who is passionate about seeing meningitis defeated?

Stay informed and join the Race to 2030 movement.

Find out more [here](#).

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Notes: This explainer has been created by Meningitis Research Foundation and sets out our current understanding of the World Health Organization's guidelines on meningitis diagnosis, treatment and care. This guide has been created for CoMO members and other civil society organisations to support activists around the world in engaging with and advocating for the vision of the WHO Global Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030.

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