Meningitis health communications: examining channels, messaging, and best practice in the African Meningitis Belt

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Introduction

Given its multiple causes, broad impact and complex clinical definition, meningitis is a difficult topic to communicate. Awareness is critical, and health communications require nuance within a crowded communication landscape.

This research evaluates approaches to, and the need for, communication and engagement with a range of audiences about meningitis. The aim is to provide insights and tools that can help ministries of health, non-governmental organisations, and civil society to develop and implement effective communication approaches that enable health seeking behaviour.

Method

Online questionnaire, offered in French and English, distributed to health professionals in the Meningitis Belt; a string of 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that suffers the highest global burden of the disease. 25 responses were received from 16 of the 26 countries in the Meningitis Belt (62% coverage). Multiple responses were received from Nigeria, Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Findings will contribute to the following strategic goals:

17. Ensure and raise awareness of communities about the impact of meningitis and available support after meningitis.
18. Ensure that people and communities know how to access meningitis vaccines, other prevention and support after meningitis, and that they value and demand them.
19. Maintain high vaccine confidence.

Key Finding

Respondents consistently cited funding gaps as a key barrier.

Impact

Significant gaps in capacity and resource investment limit communication reach and impact.

Recommendation

Funding must be ensured at the global, regional and country levels.

Training of local communications staff will build long-term capacity.

Key Finding

Vaccination is the main focus of current key messaging.

Limited messaging exists for meningitis signs and symptoms, risk factors, treatment, impact, aftercare and support.

Impact

Low awareness of meningitis signs and symptoms, risk factors, treatment, impact, aftercare and support amongst some populations (e.g., parents/guardians).

Recommendation

Country communicators should develop meningitis messaging appropriate to their context, including for the introduction and rollout of new meningitis vaccines.

Section 3 of the report includes example key messages to address this gap.

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