

Global HIV, viral hepatitis epidemics and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) continue to pose significant public health challenges, causing 2.5 million deaths each year, according to a new WHO report released Tuesday.

Combined with insufficient decline seen in the reduction of new HIV and viral hepatitis infections, the report entitled “Implementing the global health sector strategies on HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections, 2022–2030” flags threats to the attainment of the related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

New data show that STIs are increasing in many regions with the highest incidence in Africa.

In 2022, WHO Member States set out an ambitious target of reducing the annual number of adult syphilis infections by ten-fold by 2030, from 7.1 million to 0.71 million.

Yet, new syphilis cases among adults aged 15-49 years increased by over 1 million in 2022 reaching 8 million.

“The rising incidence of syphilis raises major concerns”, said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of the report.

Despite the availability of the tools required to end these epidemics as public health threats by 2030, Dr Tedros stressed the need to ensure that, in the context of an increasingly complex world, countries do all they can to achieve the ambitious targets they set themselves.

“There has been important progress on a number of other fronts including in accelerating access to critical health commodities including diagnostics and treatment,” he said.

Four curable STIs – syphilis (*Treponema pallidum*), gonorrhoea (*Neisseria gonorrhoeae*), chlamydia (*Chlamydia trachomatis*), and trichomoniasis (*Trichomonas vaginalis*) – account for over 1 million infections daily. The report notes a surge in adult and maternal syphilis (1.1 million) and associated congenital syphilis (523 cases per 100 000 live births per year) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, there were 230 000 syphilis-related deaths.

New data also show an increase in multi-resistant gonorrhoea. As of 2023, out of 87

countries where enhanced gonorrhoea antimicrobial resistance surveillance was conducted, 9 countries reported elevated levels (from 5% to 40%) of resistance to ceftriaxone, the last line treatment for gonorrhoea. WHO is monitoring the situation and has updated its recommended treatment to reduce the spread of this multi-resistant gonorrhoea strain.

In 2022, around 1.2 million new hepatitis B cases and nearly 1 million new hepatitis C cases were recorded. The estimated number of deaths from viral hepatitis rose from 1.1 million in 2019 to 1.3 million in 2022 despite effective prevention, diagnosis, and treatment tools.

New HIV infections only reduced from 1.5 million in 2020 to 1.3 million in 2022. Five key population groups — men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, sex workers, transgender individuals, and individuals in prisons and other closed settings — still experience significantly higher HIV prevalence rates than the general population.

An estimated 55% of new HIV infections occur among these populations and their partners. HIV-related deaths continue to be high. In 2022, there were 630 000 HIV related deaths, 13% of these occurring in children under the age of 15 years.

Globally, HIV treatment coverage reached 76%, with 93% of people receiving treatment achieving suppressed viral loads. Efforts to increase HPV vaccination and screening for women with HIV are ongoing. Diagnosis and treatment coverage for hepatitis B and C have seen slight improvements globally.