A world free from meningitis

Now is the time for action.

1 in 10 people who get meningitis will die. Tragically, **around 1 in 3 of all deaths** from meningitis are in **children under five**. The time for action is now – learn more about why we need to act on meningitis and how you can make a difference.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is the swelling of the lining around the brain and spinal cord (the meninges) and is usually caused by a bacterial, fungal or viral infection.

It changes lives and can be life-threatening.

> **Our one and only son was gone. In the span of a day, our world had been flipped upside down.**
>
> **Marcia King**, mother of Spencer
> USA

Why should meningitis be a public health priority?

The high burden of disease

- There are around **2.5 million** cases of meningitis every year.
- **1 in 6 people** who get bacterial meningitis will die.
- Bacterial meningitis leaves **1 in 5 people** with life-long disabilities, including hearing loss, brain damage or limb loss.

The widespread impact on communities

- **Meningitis can affect anyone, anywhere, at any time**, often without warning.
- Even in countries with strong health and immunisation systems, outbreaks still occur and must be controlled quickly.
- **The impact of meningitis is devastating**. It takes lives or leaves people with life-long disabilities. Yet many survivors receive no after care, leaving their needs unidentified and unsupported.

Growing threat

- Without action now, **400,000 more people will be left with a life-changing disability** caused by meningitis in 2030 alone.
- Rising antimicrobial resistance is impacting effective meningitis treatment. This makes **vaccination even more critical in order to prevent cases**.

The social and economic cost

- **Meningitis affects survivors and caregivers**, limiting education, work, income, and independence.
- According to the World Health Organization **improving prevention, diagnosis and treatment for meningitis, could save up to $10 billion** in direct healthcare costs by 2030.

Did you know?

In 2022, under 1% of global research funding into meningitis focused on long-term effects of the disease.

This means vital breakthroughs on after care and support are still not being identified.

What causes meningitis?

There are many causes, the most common are bacterial, viral or fungal infections.

Bacterial meningitis

Strikes suddenly, can kill within hours or cause life-long disabilities and is largely vaccine-preventable.

Viral meningitis

Serious but almost never life-threatening. May cause short-term, or more rarely, life-long after-effects.

Fungal meningitis

Rare and usually only affects people with weakened immune systems. Acts much more slowly but can be fatal.

John was a Doctor, I'm a Physiotherapist – but even now I wouldn't recognise it as anything different to flu.

Di Spalding, wife of John
UK

What are the signs and symptoms of meningitis?

Fever and/ or vomiting

Stiff neck

Avoiding bright light

Sleepy/difficult to wake

Muscle, joint and/or limb pain

Seizures (fits)

Rash

Confused

Cold hands and feet

Severe headache

Symptoms may appear in any order - or some not at all.
Always trust your instincts and get medical help fast.

The Global Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030

The World Health Organization (WHO) has created the **Global Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030**. This is a global plan to transform how meningitis is prevented, diagnosed and treated. It is designed to support governments worldwide to tackle vaccine-preventable meningitis by outlining clear milestones for action between now and 2030.

Turning the Road Map into reality could **eliminate bacterial meningitis epidemics, reduce disability** and **improve aftercare** for everyone – ultimately **saving over 920,000 lives by 2030**.

Since its approval at the World Health Assembly in 2020, 2025 marks the halfway point to the Road Map's goal of defeating meningitis by 2030. **Now is the time for action.**

Make meningitis a political priority

Policy makers have the power to save lives and shape the future of public health.

The Road Map calls on countries to tackle meningitis by developing, implementing and prioritising national plans to defeat meningitis. This can help give visibility to the threat posed by meningitis and set out what countries need to do to defeat it.

Has your government created a national plan to defeat meningitis?

If not, start by reading the "Developing national meningitis plans: an operational manual" produced by the WHO.

Already working on a plan?

Strengthen it by collaborating with civil society experts from **Meningitis Research Foundation's** international membership network, the **Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO)**.

If a plan has already been developed, publish it so healthcare providers, advocates, and communities know your next steps.

> **"Meningitis changed me but didn't break me. My life may never be the same as before meningitis, but I choose to embrace the changes and keep living fully."**

Annerine Steyn
South Africa

World Meningitis Day - What it is and why it matters

World Meningitis Day is the world's largest day of collective action on meningitis.

Founded by the **Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO)** and **coordinated by Meningitis Research Foundation**, it brings people together to educate communities and call for urgent action.

World Meningitis Day plays a key role in supporting the World Health Organization's Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030. It is a milestone within the road map and it is a powerful opportunity to encourage funders and policymakers to prioritise meningitis and embed the road map into national health plans.

Supporting World Meningitis Day raises life-saving awareness and drives momentum towards the goal of defeating meningitis by 2030.

Making an impact on World Meningitis Day

In 2024, **1.7 billion** people were reached with life-saving information in **135 countries**.

> **By raising awareness, improving access to vaccines and advocating for better policies, we can save lives and create a healthier future for all**
>
> **Dr Spensa'r Fulgence,** Medical Doctor and Friend of CoMO, Tanzania

Join the global movement

Take action on the 5th October

Light the road ahead

Join us in illuminating something on 5th October at 20:30 to remember all those affected by meningitis. Share your moment on social media using **#WorldMeningitisDay** or **#DefeatMeningitis**.

Tell your story, your way

If you have been affected by meningitis, share your story and be one of the 2,030 voices for 2030. Help build the largest digital collection of meningitis experiences to show others they're not alone and highlight the disease's lasting impact. Find out more: meningitis.org/meningitis-in-your-words

Speak up to save a life

Help spread life-saving awareness of meningitis by sharing any of the free resources from our digital toolkit, using **#WorldMeningitisDay** or **#DefeatMeningitis**.

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