World Meningitis Day | 5th October 2026

Now is the time for action

Introduction
Meningitis is fast. It is ruthless. And it can kill within 24 hours. (1)

It can strike anyone, anywhere, at any time, changing lives in a matter of hours.

Even with access to medical care, meningitis can progress so rapidly that people may run out of time before they get the treatment they need. For those who survive, the impact can last a lifetime, with disabilities such as hearing loss, brain damage, limb loss and epilepsy requiring long-term care and support.

But meningitis can be defeated. We know the tools that are needed to save lives and protect futures: greater access to vaccines, faster diagnosis, better treatment and support and increased investment to deliver these to everyone. (1, 2)

Now we need action.

That is what World Meningitis Day is all about. Founded by the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations and coordinated by Meningitis Research Foundation, it is the world's largest movement dedicated to collective action on meningitis. It is the moment to raise our voices, share life-saving awareness, support those affected and demand the urgent healthcare improvements needed to defeat this disease.

Key messages

Protect: know what meningitis is

- Meningitis is deadly and debilitating. It can kill within 24 hours (1). If you suspect meningitis, get medical help fast.
- Meningitis is a medical emergency. It causes swelling of the lining around the brain and spinal cord (the meninges) and is usually caused by a bacterial, fungal or viral infection. (2)
- Across the world, there are around 2.5 million cases of meningitis every year. (3)
- The latest estimates tell us that, in 2023, over a quarter of a million people died from meningitis. 1 in 3 of those deaths are children under five. (3)
- Bacterial meningitis is especially deadly: the World Health Organization estimates that around 1 in 6 people who get it will die. (4)

- 1 in 5 meningitis survivors will live with life-long disabilities, including hearing loss, brain damage, limb loss and epilepsy. (4)

- Vaccines are our strongest tool for preventing meningitis, protecting people from its devastating consequences.

- Recognising the signs and symptoms of meningitis early, and getting medical help fast, can make the difference between life and death.

- Making the World Health Organization's *Global Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030* a reality will eliminate bacterial meningitis epidemics, reduce disability and save the lives of more than 920,000 people by 2030. (5)

- Saving lives from meningitis also protects people from pneumonia and sepsis. By defeating meningitis, we tackle three of the top ten causes of death in children under five. (5)

Support: action is needed now

- Meningitis leaves people with disabilities that last a lifetime, including hearing loss, limb loss, scarring and kidney damage. Without action, meningitis will leave 400,000 more people with a life-changing disability in 2030 alone. (5, 6)

- For many people across the world, there is no healthcare follow-up after meningitis, stopping life-long disabilities being identified and supported. (5)

- Meningitis causes learning and intellectual disabilities, including memory loss, lack of concentration and issues with thinking and problem-solving. (6)

- All over the world, families are left to deal with the consequences of meningitis on their own, including bereavement, disability and mental health challenges. (5, 6)

- Meningitis has health, economic and social consequences. It affects the lives of those who survive and those who look after them, impacting their ability to go to school, have a career, earn an income and live independently. (5)

- The World Health Organization's *Global Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030* includes goals to increase access to care and support for people affected by meningitis and their families. We must see action, investment and commitment to make this happen.

Defeat: we need a world free from meningitis

- Defeating meningitis by 2030 could create more than $100 billion in economic benefits. By reducing cases, preventing deaths and limiting the life-changing disabilities caused by meningitis, we all gain. (5)

- Dying from meningitis is mostly preventable, yet stopping it remains behind other infectious diseases. While measles and tetanus deaths have been cut by more than 80% since 2000, meningitis deaths have fallen by just 40%. (3)

- Defeating meningitis reduces poverty, improves health and well-being, ensures people can stay in education, enhances people's ability to work and to live independently, and reduces inequality amongst communities and countries. Acting on meningitis will positively impact six of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (5)

- By improving prevention, diagnosis and treatment for meningitis, we could save up to $10 billion in direct healthcare costs by 2030. (5)
- The World Health Organization's *Global Road Map to Defeat Meningitis by 2030* commits every UN member state to develop its own national plan for defeating meningitis. We need our governments to stand by this commitment.

- To defeat meningitis, countries, global health organisations and donors must act with greater commitment and urgency. Their action can save lives and give millions of people a brighter, healthier future.

#DefeatMeningitis | #WorldMeningitisDay

How to support World Meningitis Day (5th October 2026)

In 2025, World Meningitis Day reached 1 billion people in 148 countries. Here's how you can join the World Meningitis Day movement in 2026 and help drive change to defeat meningitis.

1. **Speak up to save a life**

Share free resources from our toolkit, using #WorldMeningitisDay or #DefeatMeningitis, to spread life-saving awareness.

Then go the extra mile on 5th October: demand a world where no one is left unprotected from meningitis because of where they live or what they can afford. Tag the World Health Organization and Gavi in a social media post calling for sustained investment in immunisation, so every country has access to the meningitis vaccines needed to protect their communities.

2. **Tell your story, your way**

If you have been affected by meningitis, you can easily share your experience. Doing this helps others facing meningitis feel less alone and enables leaders in health to understand its true impact.

Add your voice to the world's largest digital collection of meningitis experiences and show the world that meningitis must not be ignored.

3. **Light the road ahead**

Wherever you are, join millions of people lighting up 5th October at 20:30 (8.30pm). Share your 'light the road ahead' moment using #WorldMeningitisDay or #DefeatMeningitis.

Together, we will remember everyone affected by meningitis and show we support a world free from this disease.

World Meningitis Day is coordinated by the world's leading meningitis charity, Meningitis Research Foundation. The Day was pioneered by people whose lives had been deeply affected by meningitis and who wanted to ensure no one else experienced the devastating effects of a meningitis diagnosis alone - members of the Confederation of Meningitis Organisations (CoMO). CoMO is the global member network of Meningitis Research Foundation and is a growing and vibrant force for change, with members operating in over 50 countries across the world.

References

1. Defeating Meningitis by 2030, A Global Road Map, World Health Organization, 2021.
2. What is meningitis, Meningitis Research Foundation, 2025.
3. Global Burden of Disease Study 2023, Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2025, Seattle, United States; Meningitis Progress Tracker, Meningitis Research Foundation, 2026.
4. Meningitis: key facts. World Health Organization, Geneva, 2023.
5. Investing to defeat meningitis and beyond, World Health Organization, 2024.
6. What are the after-effects of meningitis? Meningitis Research Foundation, 2025.