



## Hepatitis in the Americas

### Key facts

- In most of the countries of the Americas, more than 50% of the population has acquired natural immunity to hepatitis A virus by the age of 15. However, endemic cases are decreasing in the Region and exposure to the virus diminishes, increasing the risk of outbreaks in older age groups.
- Globally, an estimated 57% of liver cirrhosis cases and 78% of primary liver cancer cases result from infection with hepatitis B or C viruses. In the Americas, prevalence of infection with hepatitis B virus oscillates in average from values below 2% to 4% and; between 7 and 9 million adults are estimated to be infected by hepatitis C virus in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- In 2009, more than 99% of blood units donated in Latin America and the Caribbean were screened for hepatitis B and C viruses' markers. Also 500,000 potential blood donors were deferred due to risk factors for hepatitis B or C viruses or HIV and; more than 78,000 donated blood bags were found to be infected with hepatitis B or C viruses.
- Globally, the reuse of injection equipment in healthcare settings in 2000 accounted for 32% and 40% of new hepatitis B and C infections respectively, leading to a burden higher than 27,000 DALYs in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua and Peru between 2000 and 2030. Appropriate interventions could reduce the burden of injection-associated infections as much as 96.5%.
- The WHO reported in 2002 that of the 35 million health-care workers worldwide, 2 million experience percutaneous exposure to infectious diseases each year. It further noted that between 65% and 80% of hepatitis B and around 55% of hepatitis C in Latin America and the Caribbean's health-care workers are due to needle stick injuries.
- In the Americas, co/super-infection with hepatitis D virus occurs, with particular impact in the Amazonian region, especially among indigenous populations.
- Low but varying prevalence and outbreaks of hepatitis E virus have been reported in some countries of the Americas. However, little is known about the epidemiology of this infection in the Region, and higher prevalences have been reported in some countries.
- Four countries (Argentina, Panama, United States and Uruguay) have introduced hepatitis A vaccination in their routine immunization childhood programs.
- All countries in the Americas have officially introduced hepatitis B vaccination in their routine immunization childhood programs.

### Key PAHO actions

In May 2010, World Health Assembly adopted resolution [WHA 63.18](#) that:

- Designated July 28th as World Hepatitis Day
- Requested the Director-General to establish, in collaboration with Member States, the necessary guidelines, strategies, time-bound goals and tools for the surveillance, prevention and control of viral hepatitis

To take immediate action in the Americas, PAHO has performed the following activities through the creation of PAHO Viral Hepatitis Working Group:

1. Commemoration of World Hepatitis Day 2011 and 2012
2. PAHO first Regional Meeting on Viral Hepatitis in March 2012.
3. Elaboration and definition of a Regional Strategy for Prevention and Control of Viral Hepatitis
4. Consultation of the Regional Strategy in the countries and territories of the Americas

Further activities to reduce the burden of viral hepatitis in the Americas, are being planned using an integrated approach through PAHO Working Group and in collaboration with Member States and external partners.

For more information, please visit: [www.paho.org/hepatitis](http://www.paho.org/hepatitis)