



PRESS RELEASE

World Hepatitis Day

Kigali, July 28, 2025-World Hepatitis Day is observed each year on July 28 to increase awareness of viral hepatitis, a liver infection that causes serious liver damage and liver cancer. This year, Rwanda joins the rest of the World to commemorate all the efforts that have been deployed in hepatitis prevention, care, and treatment towards the elimination of hepatitis B and C.

The global theme entitled “ *Hepatitis: Let’s Break It Down*” calls for immediate action to remove the financial, social, and systemic hurdles - including stigma - to hepatitis elimination and liver cancer prevention.

As the World celebrates the Hepatitis Day, it is an opportunity to review and reflect on national and international progress towards Hepatitis elimination, and increase efforts to strengthen case finding strategies, inclusive access to testing and treatment services and reaffirm actions and engagement at all levels including leadership, partners, civil societies and communities, to ensure a comprehensive approach towards viral hepatitis elimination.

Hepatitis is a global public health issue that causes a high global burden of morbidity and mortality. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that both viral hepatitis B and C cause 1.3 million deaths every year (1 person dies every 30 seconds) and 3.0 million new infections annually. More to the point, the epidemic of viral hepatitis B and C affects 304 million people globally and is nearly 10 times larger than the global HIV epidemic. Every day 3,500 people die of viral hepatitis-related liver disease, liver failure and liver cancer.

Additionally, in Africa, chronic viral hepatitis affects over 70 million Africans (60 million with hepatitis B and 10 million with hepatitis C). Dying from viral hepatitis in Africa is becoming a bigger threat than dying from HIV/AIDS, malaria or tuberculosis with at least 200,000 deaths a year.

The Global Health Sector Strategy (GHSS) on viral hepatitis, approved by the World Health Assembly in 2016, has the vision of a world where transmission of viral hepatitis is halted and everyone living with viral hepatitis has access to safe, affordable and effective prevention, diagnosis, care and treatment. Its goal is to eliminate viral hepatitis as a major public health problem by 2030.

In Rwanda, a national plan for Viral Hepatitis C (HCV) elimination was launched in December 2018, with the goal to screen 7 million people aged 15 years and above and treat all positive cases, which aimed to reduce the HCV prevalence from 4% to 1% in less than 5 years. By launching the HCV national elimination plan, Rwanda is the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to have done so.

Throughout the years, Rwanda has made significant progress in implementing HIV and Viral Hepatitis Control measures, including early screening of the blood supply, ensuring safe injections at health facilities, the establishment of a Hepatitis program in 2014, the subsequent publication of National Guidelines and the launch of viral hepatitis elimination in 2018.

Rwandan has recorded major achievements in viral hepatitis management:

- Hepatitis services are free of charge for all citizens and refugees residing in Rwanda in all public health facilities across the country.
- More than 8 million people aged 15 years and above have been tested for HCV and more than 45,000 people have been treated and cured for HCV and those who failed the first line treatment were initiated on the second line treatment.
- More than 5 million people have been tested for viral Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and 9,000 people are on lifelong HBV treatment
- Over 7,000,000 people including children and adults have been vaccinated for HBV.
- Hepatitis testing and treatment are decentralized and task shifting has been implemented to increase access to hepatitis services to the population in need. Hepatitis testing and treatment services are provided by medical doctors and nurses in all public health facilities, including hospitals and health centres.
- The prevalence of viral hepatitis B and C reduced from 3% and 4% in 2017 to 0.25% and 0.21% respectively in 2024
- Rwanda received an award in 2023 from the World Hepatitis Alliance for its outstanding contribution towards viral hepatitis elimination in Africa.
- In the context of triple elimination of HIV, Hepatitis B and Syphilis by 2030, pregnant women are routinely screened for HBV at the first antenatal care visit and delivery. All newborns from infected mothers receive the hepatitis B Birth Dose vaccine as part of targeted vaccination within 24 hours and additional Hepatitis B Immune globulin.

The viral hepatitis program is now sustaining the achievements towards viral hepatitis elimination through timely diagnosis, treatment and vaccination.

Going forward, the program keeps efforts not only to avail hepatitis services in high-risk populations (Correctional Facilities, Rehabilitation Centres,...) but also to introduce Universal Hepatitis B Birth Dose vaccination and to apply for HCV elimination validation.

Awareness is the first step to elimination. On this special occasion, we urge all Rwandans to learn about viral hepatitis; how it spreads, how it affects the liver, and how it can be prevented and treated. Hepatitis B and C are silent threats, but with testing, vaccination, and timely treatment, they can be controlled and even eliminated. Know your status, protect your loved ones, and join Rwanda's journey toward a hepatitis-free future.

Through continued commitment, leadership support, and strong partnerships, Rwanda, through the Ministry of Health, is committed to showcasing that Hepatitis elimination is possible.

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