

Topic: Program management and intergration

Research Challenge to be Addressed: The session will address the major challenges in implementing preventive chemotherapy against leprosy under program conditions. Who should be targeted, how to implement and monitor, and how many are at risk?

Overall aim of the session: Leprosy was eliminated as a public health problem in 2000 but over the last 15 years global case notification has stalled at a level of above 200,000 cases annually. Cases continue to arise among young people, born after 2000, indicating that transmission has not been interrupted. One of the strategies proposed to overcome this stalemate is post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) based on a single dose of Rifampicin given to contacts of leprosy patients. This new strategy for preventive chemotherapy (PCT) against leprosy has now been endorsed by WHO, but work is continuing on testing approaches to implementation and on improving the PEP regimen. The current recommendation is to a large extent based on the results of a pivotal trial in Bangladesh. Currently a number of trials are underway assessing different aspects of leprosy PCT in different settings. A recent modeling study has produced the first ever estimates of the population at risk for leprosy.

The aim of this session is to discuss a way forward in implementing the WHO recommendation for PEP in different contexts, taking into account the various challenges, especially how to reach optimal coverage of the population at risk.

We foresee four presentations:

1. Zaahira Gani: Leprosy Post Exposure Prophylaxis (LPEP) Project: implementation pathway from pilot to practice
2. Khorshed Amal: Results of the MALTALEP trial, combining PEP with BCG vaccination
3. Wim van Brakel: The PEP++ Project, PEP4LEP and estimates of the population at risk of leprosy: implications for PCT implementation at national, provincial and district level.
4. Stéphanie Ramboarina: Planning and monitoring implementation of PEP, first experiences from the PEOPLE trial

Desired outputs: We expect this session to be an opportunity for exchange between scientists and NTD control program managers with the aim of identifying context specific solutions for implementation of PCT against leprosy in relation to the population at risk to be covered. The potential solutions identified would lead to new operational research to try these out in control program settings.