



15 February 2022 - On 26 January 2022, the World Health Organization validated Saudi Arabia as having eliminated trachoma as a public health problem, making it the fourth country in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region to achieve this milestone. Trachoma is a neglected tropical eye disease. Children acquire the infection at a young age. Inflammation can then lead to progressive scarring of the eye lid, with long-term consequences years or even decades later that can lead to blindness.

Saudi Arabia's success in eliminating trachoma is largely attributed to the efforts of the Ministry of Health following the integration of a comprehensive eye care programme into primary health care services, and in collaboration with the efforts extended by other public sectors, including the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture.

"This is a remarkable achievement that has saved people from preventable visual impairment or blindness. It is about improving quality of life and well-being," said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for Eastern Mediterranean. "Such success stories are encouraging and help us to eliminate more diseases in our Region."

Saudi Arabia and WHO will continue to closely monitor previously endemic areas to ensure that there is a rapid, proportionate response to any resurgence. Saudi Arabia, with the support of WHO, is also tackling other neglected tropical diseases, including schistosomiasis, worm infestations acquired from walking barefoot, and leishmaniasis. The sustained efforts of health staff are critical to ending such diseases.

Trachoma remains endemic in five countries of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region but progress has been made over the past few years. The number of people requiring antibiotic treatment for trachoma in the Region fell by 28 million from 39 million in 2013 to 11 million in 2020. To eliminate trachoma throughout the natural history of the disease, WHO recommends the SAFE strategy to achieve elimination of trachoma as a public -health problem. This includes: 1) Surgery to correct complications related to inversion of eyelids; 2) Antibiotics to cure infection; 3) Facial cleanliness to prevent transmission among children; and 4) Environmental improvement that leads to better hygiene. Elimination of trachoma is inexpensive, simple and extremely cost-effective, yielding a high rate of net economic return.

Progress against trachoma and other neglected tropical diseases has alleviated the human and economic burden that they impose on the world's most disadvantaged communities. The 2021–2030 road map for neglected tropical diseases seeks to prevent, control, eliminate or eradicate 20 diseases and disease groups by 2030.

Saturday 27th of April 2024 08:49:59 AM