

1 May 2012, Cairo – Cutaneous leishmaniasis is highly prevalent in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. The disease is endemic in 18 out of the 23 countries and, despite not being fatal, it causes immense stigma affecting the social and economic well-being of affected people and communities. Cutaneous leishmaniasis is a potentially severe or disfiguring disease. Patients with cutaneous leishmaniasis have one or several long-lasting lesions on the skin, usually without fever or general symptoms.

Leishmaniasis is a poverty-related disease. It affects the poorest of the poor and is associated with malnutrition, displacement, poor housing, illiteracy, gender discrimination, weakness of the immune system and lack of resources. Leishmaniasis is also linked to environmental changes, such as deforestation, building of dams, new irrigation schemes and urbanization, and the accompanying migration of non-immune people to endemic areas.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, which comprises 23 countries of the Middle East, North Africa and South West Asia, accounts for the highest burden of cutaneous leishmaniasis worldwide with over 100 000 cases reported per year. The actual number of disease cases is, however, estimated to be three to five times higher. Many patients suffering from cutaneous leishmaniasis never seek medical attention, and not all patients with a diagnosis are reported to health authorities, contributing to a fewer number of cases being recorded.

Cutaneous leishmaniasis is complex to treat and control. The several leishmaniasis species causing the disease, the transmitting vector and the geographical distribution of the disease across the Region makes it difficult for a single, ready-to-use method of control and treatment. WHO is committed to providing technical support to countries for its control and has recently developed the first “Strategic plan on cutaneous leishmaniasis control for the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region: 2012–2016” and guidelines for case management of the disease. This strategic plan provides a standardized framework for countries, making it easier to monitor and evaluate the progress in the efficacy of medicines and the control of cutaneous leishmaniasis. The case management guidelines provide essential information on the parasite, on the way it is transmitted and spreads, on how to make the diagnosis and how to treat patients. It is expected that the plan and guidelines will reduce people’s suffering from this disease and will have a positive impact on people’s health in the Region.

The launch of the strategic plan and guidelines coincides with a 3-day meeting of programme managers from countries of the Region. The meeting, being held at the WHO Regional Office, Cairo, from 30 April to 2 May, 2012, will review cutaneous leishmaniasis control activities in the

Region.

Friday 26th of April 2024 07:50:37 PM