Report of a WHO Expert Committee

In the 1960s, it appeared that human African trypanosomiasis (HAT) could be effectively controlled, but by the beginning of the twenty-first century several decades of neglect had led to alarming numbers of reported new cases, with an estimated 300 000 people infected. The World Health Organization (WHO) responded with a series of initiatives aimed at bringing HAT under control again. Since 2001, the pharmaceutical companies that produce drugs for HAT have committed themselves to providing them free of charge to WHO for distribution for the treatment of patients. In addition, funds have been provided to WHO to support national sleeping sickness control programmes to boost control and surveillance of the disease. That, coupled with bilateral cooperation and the work of nongovernmental organizations, helped reverse the upward trend in HAT prevalence. By 2012, the number of reported cases was fewer than 8000. This success in bringing HAT under control led to its inclusion in the WHO Roadmap for eradication, elimination and control of neglected tropical diseases, with a target set to eliminate the disease as a public health problem by 2020. A further target has been set, by countries in which HAT is endemic, to eliminate gambiense HAT by reducing the incidence of infection to zero in a defined geographical area.

This report provides information about new diagnostic approaches, new therapeutic regimens and better understanding of the distribution of the disease with high-quality mapping. The roles of human and animal reservoirs and the tsetse fly vectors that transmit the parasites are emphasized. The new information has formed the basis for an integrated strategy with which it is hoped that elimination of gambiense HAT will be achieved. The report also contains recommendations on the approaches that will lead to elimination of the disease.







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Report of a WHO Expert Committee

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