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WHO ALERT REGARDING THE ESCALATING ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE OF NEISSERIA GONORRHOEAE

A recent report published by the World Health Organization (WHO), through the Enhanced Gonococcal Antimicrobial Surveillance Programme (ESGAP), highlights an alarming epidemiological trend characterized by the increasing prevalence of multidrug-resistant *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* strains.

Analysis of data collected between 2022 and 2024 reveals a significant degradation in susceptibility to first-line therapeutic agents. Specifically, resistance rates to **ceftriaxone** and **cefixime**—the current standard of care—have shown substantial increases, rising from 0.8% to 5% and from 1.7% to 11%, respectively. This development is deemed critical, given that these cephalosporins represent the last reliable empiric options for monotherapy.

Additionally, resistance to **azithromycin**, frequently administered in combination therapy to enhance clinical efficacy, has increased from 0.5% to 4%. Furthermore, an extremely high level of resistance to **ciprofloxacin** persists, being identified in 95% of the tested isolates.

The study is based on the analysis of 3,615 cases reported in 2024 from 12 countries (Brazil, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Philippines, Qatar, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Uganda, and Vietnam), with the highest resistance rates documented in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Gonorrhea, with an estimated global incidence of 82 million cases annually, is classified by the WHO as a serious and urgent threat to public health. Therapeutic failure can lead to severe sequelae, including pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy, and female infertility.

Dr. Tereza Kasaeva, Director of the WHO Global HIV, Hepatitis and STIs Programmes, emphasized the imperative of integrating gonococcal surveillance into national health programs, as ESGAP data are essential for grounding prevention and response strategies. Concurrently, new therapeutic hopes are linked to two agents currently in advanced clinical trials: zoliflodacin and gepotidacin.

The situation demands urgent global mobilization to monitor resistance, implement strict antimicrobial stewardship policies, and accelerate research for the development of new therapeutic classes, to prevent a major therapeutic impasse in the management of sexually transmitted infections.

Adapted after Chris Dall, MA, 27 July 2023