

# HEALTH BRIEF

28 April - 12 May 2023

## Health Updates 5 May 2023

### COVID-19 updates



New cases

**791**

Cumulative cases

**1 237 127**



New deaths

**11**

Cumulative deaths

**10 906**

### CHOLERA updates



New cases

**0**

Cumulative cases

**7 633**

New deaths

**0**

Cumulative deaths

**23**

## Epidemiology situation - Based on MOPH data

### A. Acute Respiratory Infections

- Following the first draft in 2009 and the second update in 2018 of the national pandemic preparedness plan, the MoPH has recently undertaken, with the support of WHO, a comprehensive multisectoral effort to update the national pandemic preparedness plan. This update has broadened national preparedness towards an all-hazard approach while leveraging lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and the simulation exercise conducted in August 2022 that focused on aspects of coordination, triggers for decision-making, and communication.
- In the next few months, Lebanon will use the new guidance to address critical gaps in the plan and complete the transition towards a comprehensive and integrated pandemic preparedness plan.
- Several efforts and resources are contributing to achieve the comprehensive plan, including a simulation exercise conducted in August 2022, as well as recent multisectoral efforts to draft a proposal for the Pandemic Fund.

### COVID-19

- Based on recommendations from the IHR Emergency Committee, the WHO Director-General has determined that COVID-19 is now an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). The Committee members recommendations are based on the decreasing trend in COVID-19 deaths, the declining in COVID-19 related hospitalizations and intensive care unit admissions, and the high levels of population immunity to SARS-CoV-2.
- Globally, nearly 2.7 million new cases and over 17,000 deaths were reported during the last month, representing a decrease of 14% in incidence and 17% in mortality as compared to the previous month. Overall, over 765 million confirmed cases and over 6.9 million deaths have been reported globally since the start of the pandemic.
- Globally, while recombinant Omicron variants XBB.1.5 continues to account for the majority of circulating SARS-CoV-2

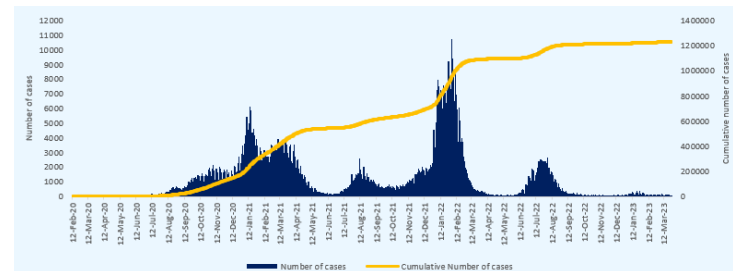


Figure 1: COVID-19 epi curve in Lebanon

- strains, its prevalence has slightly dropped to 45.1% of cases in the 16th epidemiological week as compared to 52% in the 12th epidemiological week. In parallel, XBB.1.16 is on the rise and accounting for 8.6% of circulating strains globally.
- In Lebanon, a total of 791 new COVID-19 cases and 11 associated deaths were reported during the past two weeks. The highest COVID-19 incidence was reported from Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Over the past week, there has been 7 new death and the case fatality ratio stands at 0.88.
- In total, Lebanon has registered a total of 1,237,127 COVID-19 cases and 10,906 deaths since the start of the pandemic.
- On daily average for the past week, 8% of the ICU beds are occupied for COVID-19 patients.
- The 4th round of the national sero-epidemiological study for COVID-19 infection was successfully completed with a total of 1,539 participants enrolled. The sero-convergence was found to be 89.5% among Lebanese communities, 83.4% among Syrian informal settlements, and 86.5% among Palestinian refugee camps.
- WHO continues to support Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) sequencing for COVID-19 at national level through the Center for Infectious Disease Research at AUB
- MOPH procured and deployed the next generation COVID-19 vaccines, which are available in most of the vaccination centers.
- At national level, COVID-19 vaccine coverage remains at 50.4% for the first dose, 44.4% for the second dose, and 27.6% for the third dose.

## Integration of seasonal influenza and other respiratory disease surveillance

- With the support of the WHO, the MoPH in Lebanon has welcomed a technical mission from the WHO Regional Office from May 8 till May 12, 2023, to assess the integration status of influenza and other respiratory disease surveillance, as well as the status of the national influenza center. The objectives of this mission were to support the MoPH in strengthening national capacities for preparedness and response to seasonal influenza as well as the preparation for the potential emergence of future pathogen X of epidemic and pandemic potential. The mission findings and recommendations will help strengthen overall integrated sentinel site surveillance through refined assessment and selection of sentinel sites and capacity building of the involved health workers.
- WHO continues, through the PIP framework and the CDC influenza division, to support sentinel influenza surveillance sites through trainings, procurement of sample collection kits, and transportation of specimens.
- Lebanon has received support from the Partnership for Influenza Vaccine (PIVI) under the Task Force for Global Health and will be receiving seasonal influenza vaccine doses targeting high-risk populations, as well as financial support for a period of 3 to 5 years for necessary technical support to ensure system strengthening and a proper exit strategy.
- As part of the long-term management of COVID-19 which no longer now presents a public health emergency of international concern, Lebanon will employ a transition towards an integrated approach for respiratory disease surveillance.
- WHO will continue to support the MoPH in strengthening monitoring mechanisms of other respiratory diseases of epidemic and pandemic potential, starting with RSV among children under 5 years of age.

- During the past month, a total of 399 Acute Watery diarrhea (AWD) cases were investigated by the rapid response teams with no confirmed cholera case.
- The early warning surveillance has been intensified in the last 3 months for timely detection and confirmation of any suspected cholera cases. The MoPH has been leveraging the support of both the trained RRTs and the capacitated central and peripheral laboratories to intensify investigation and confirmatory testing for suspected cholera cases.
- On a weekly basis, there are around 100 investigation missions in the hotspot areas of Akkar, North, Bekaa, and Baalbek Hermel with no positive RDTs and none of the specimens selected for culture returning positive results.
- Lebanon deployed Oral Cholera Vaccines through door-to-door campaigns starting November 17 (epi week 46), 2022 and was able to vaccinate using a one-dose strategy over 1,151,800 individuals. The outbreak was progressively curbed with the start of 2023 which negatively affected vaccine acceptance, leading the MoPH and partners to stop the OCV campaign with around 350,000 doses remaining in stock.
- Cholera remains a significant public health concern in Lebanon and MoPH and partners will continue to sustain effective preparedness and response capacities as the risk of another cholera outbreak is high.

## B. Food and Waterborne Diseases

### Cholera

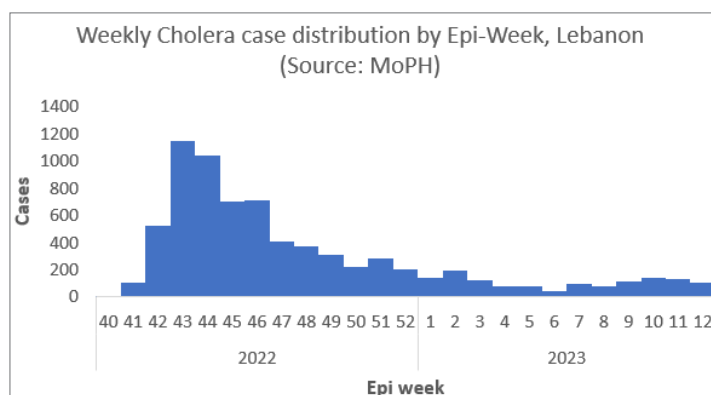


Figure 2: Distribution of suspected and confirmed cholera cases since the start of the outbreak

- There was no laboratory confirmed cholera case since 5th of January 2023, while the last cholera-associated death was registered on December 5th, 2022.
- The last cholera outbreak in 2022, a total of 7,716 suspected cases and 671 laboratory-confirmed cases with 23 associated deaths, (CFR 0.32%) were reported across the country.

### Other food and waterborne diseases

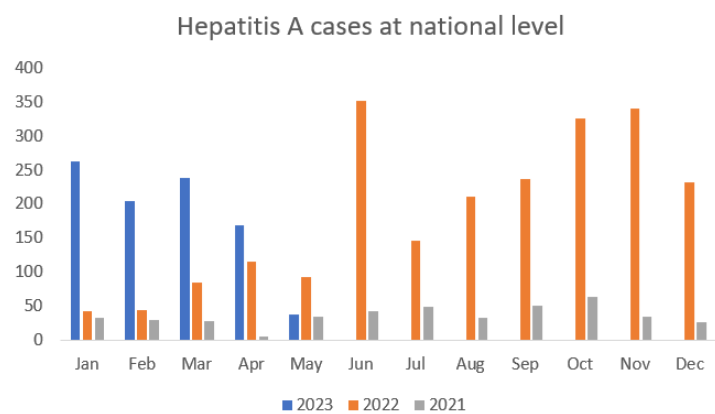


Figure 3: Number of suspected Hepatitis A cases by month for past 3 years

- Since the start of 2023, a total of 911 suspected Hepatitis A cases have been reported from medical facilities across the country, of which 32% have been reported among 10-19 years old, followed by 28.3% among 5-9 years old, and 26.3% among 20-39 years old.
- The MoPH in Lebanon is closely monitoring the epidemiological situation of other food and waterborne diseases such as Hepatitis A and typhoid.
- Coordination is ongoing between the surveillance and WASH sectors to ensure suspected cases are detected and appropriate WASH interventions are implemented.

## C. Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

Vaccine preventable diseases remain a priority by the MoPH and WHO to ensure high coverage and completeness of routine immunizations, according to the national calendar for all children under 5 to avoid any potential outbreak of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases (VPD).

### Measles

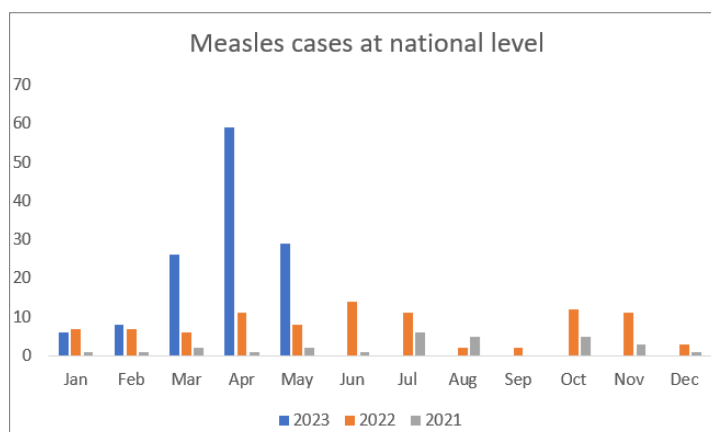


Figure 4: Number of suspected measles cases by month for past 3 years

- During the past 2 weeks, a total of 29 suspected measles cases have been reported and sent for further investigation and laboratory confirmation.
- Since the start of 2023, a total of 128 suspected measles cases were reported at national level, out of which 88 were reported during April and until the 12th of May 2023.
- Further analysis has highlighted the highest measles attack rates in the districts of Baabda, Baalbeck, and Tripoli.
- Overall, the highest attack rates is among the 0-4 age group, followed by the 5-9 age group.
- Overall, 75% of measles cases reported were zero dose children, which means those children had not taken a single dose of measles-containing vaccines throughout their life course.
- WHO is supporting the MoPH in conducting an overall measles risk assessment and in the development of a thorough outbreak investigation report in order to optimize the available resources and support in mobilizing additional needed resources.

### Poliovirus

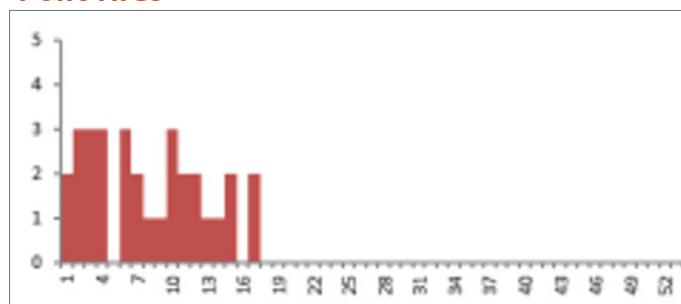


Figure 5: AFP cases by epidemiological week of onset

- During the past 2 weeks, a total of 2 AFP cases were detected through active case finding and reported for further investigation.
- Since the start of 2023, the national surveillance system was able to detect 40 suspected AFP cases. Out of the 31

investigated cases, only two cases were zero dose, i.e. case who had not taken any dose of polio-containing vaccine.

- Suspected AFP cases were distributed to Mount Lebanon (8), the North (5), Bekaa (4), Nabatieh (6), South (2), Akkar (2), and Baalbeck Hermel (3).
- The nationality of these reported cases were 68% Lebanese, 26% Syrian, and 6% Palestinian.
- WHO continues to support the MoPH with human resources for active AFP surveillance and transportation of specimens (AFP and ES) in all governorates of the country through 8 nurses and 8 drivers.
- Although Lebanon has not detected and reported cVDPV2, it has been classified as a high-risk country for cVDPV2 introduction and has completed 12 out of 16 preparedness components. The pending items are related to safety monitoring and will be completed in the next few weeks.
- WHO continues to provide technical support to update the national immunization calendar with the recent SAGE recommendations stressing on the importance of additional IPV campaigns in areas at high risk or with persistent of poliovirus circulation.

## D. Other Communicable Diseases

### Monkeypox

- Based on recommendations from the IHR Emergency Committee, the WHO Director-General has determined that the multi-country outbreak of mpox no longer represents a public health emergency of international concern while reaffirming that mpox continues to pose significant public health challenges and that integration of mpox prevention and care into existing health programs is recommended.
- Globally, there are 87,377 confirmed mpox cases, and 140 associated deaths, from 111 countries reporting cases. In the EMR, there are so far 88 confirmed cases and 1 death.
- In this global outbreak, the group primarily affected has been Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and WHO continues to support improved awareness and behaviors for risk reduction. In the African setting, transmission is occurring sexually (West Africa) but also through animal to human transmission (Central Africa).
- Since the first case was detected on the 14th of June 2022, the MoPH in Lebanon has detected and reported 27 laboratory-confirmed cases of mpox. During the current reporting period, one new mpox case was detected and reported among a man of unknown sexual orientation and travel history.
- Among these cases, 59% were between 25 and 34 years old, 19% were between 35 and 44 years old, 15% were equal or great than 45 years old. One 8-year-old female has also tested positive.
- The majority of cases were reported among males with only 2 cases among females.
- Overall, 60% of cases identified as Men who have Sex with Men (MSM).
- WHO, with the support of USAID, has engaged with 6 local thematic NGOs that will integrate HIV and mpox activities among MSM in Lebanon in order to strengthen early detection and prevention of mpox transmission at national level.

## D. Other Communicable Diseases

### Monkeypox *continued*

- Under this USAID support, a series of 11 trainings are planned for further capacity building of NGOs, and sensitization of health practitioners on case detection and management and IPC practices.
- WHO continued to extend technical and financial support to the national reference laboratory at RHUH with essential human resources, laboratory reagents and testing kits (targeted and commercial) for the mpox response.

### Meningitis

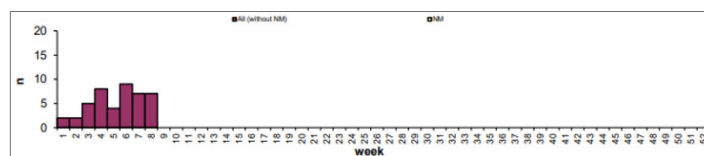
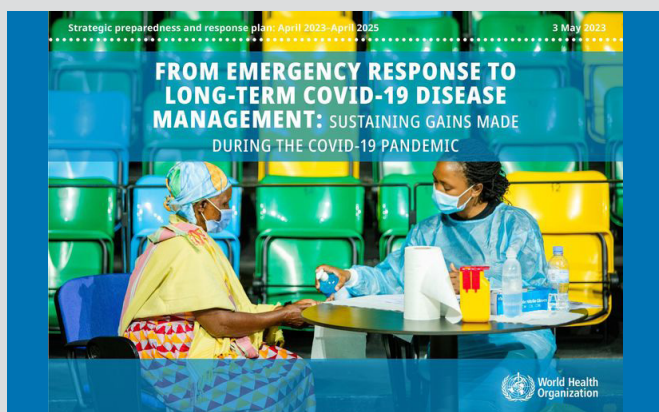


Figure 6: Meningitis cases over time

- During this reporting period, 23 new suspected cases of meningitis were reported with no associated death.
- Since the start of 2023, there were 67 reported cases of meningitis based on clinical presentation, and the most affected governorates based on incidence per 100,000 are Beirut and South. These cases were distributed in Mount Lebanon (24%), South (19.4%), Beqaa (17.9%), Beirut (14.9%), North (14.9%), Nabatieh (7.4%), and the rest unspecified.
- Upon further specimen testing (CSF and serum), 28 of these cases were classified as bacterial infection. Culture results showed 3 cases of *S. pneumoniae*, 2 *H. influenzae*, and 1 *N. meningitidis*.

## WHO response



WHO issued updated COVID-19 Global Strategic Preparedness, Readiness and Response Plan 2023-2025 to assist member states to manage COVID-19 over the next two years and sustained response in the long-term. You can access the SPRR plan in the link [here](#).



WHO declares COVID-19 over as a global health emergency. However, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus advised that it “does not mean COVID-19 is over as a global health threat. Last week, COVID-19 claimed a life every three minutes – and that’s just the deaths we know about”. Details of the meeting can be found [here](#).



The World Health Organization has declared that the Multi-Country Outbreak of monkeypox (mpox) no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on 11th of May, 2023. The Emergency Committee met on 10th of May, 2023, and advised the WHO Director-General that the Multi-Country Outbreak of monkeypox (mpox) no longer constitutes a PHEIC for the reasons detailed in the proceedings of the meeting [here](#).

## WHO response

### WHO Lebanon provides Thalassaemia medications for over 100 persons



On World Thalassaemia Day, WHO supported with access to thalassaemia care through ensuring accessibility to lifesaving medications for more than 100 patients with thalassaemia in close collaboration with the Chronic Care Center and with funding from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. The support extended from 2022 until end of 2023. WHO strives to ensure that no one is left behind.

### WHO Lebanon and National Mental Health Programme to establish Mental Health unit at Tannourine public hospital



WHO Lebanon and the National Mental Health Programme are in the process of establishing mental health services in Tannourine Governmental Hospital in collaboration with International Medical Corps and funding from the Government of Netherlands. The support included physical works for the construction of the unit, training of nurses on mental health, procurement of mental health medications, etc. During the visit to Tannourine Hospital prior to the opening of the mental health unit, WHO Representative reiterated WHO support to mental health in Lebanon and to increasing access to mental health services.

### WHO regional team visits Chronic Care Center to maximize quality for care for diabetic and thalassaemia patients



During WHO team visit to the Chronic Care Center as part of a technical mission on noncommunicable diseases management and surveillance, the discussion was focused on maximizing the quality of care including management and follow up of patients with Type 1 diabetes and Thalassaemia. WHO Lebanon is playing a key role in ensuring continued access to essential services including provision of medications for the ongoing management of noncommunicable diseases in Lebanon.

### Health Minister signs MOU with the Taskforce for Global Health to mark Lebanon's eligibility to become PIVI country



The Minister of Public Health Dr. Firass Abiad signed today a Memorandum Of Agreement with the Task Force for Global Health in the presence of the WHO team to mark the start of Lebanon's eligibility to become a PIVI (Partnership for Influenza Vaccine Introduction) country. It has become one of 24 countries that are benefitting from PIVI eligibility and support. This partnership is going to be sustained and renewed for the next 3 to 5 years. The memorandum highlights the fact that this is a long-term partnership with the Ministry. PIVI is donating the vaccines and providing technical support. WHO role is to provide technical support and expertise in terms of all the technical areas that will come with the agreement which will be funded by PIVI under the Task Force for Global Health through WHO. The formal partnership comes after intensive discussions involving the Expanded Program for Immunization (EPI) committee, with the chair National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) and other relevant immunization-related parties at the national level. This important partnership falls under WHO's objective of working hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Public Health in collaboration with global health entities to ensure regular access to vaccines and other health-related care to citizens.

## WHO response

### WHO regional team reviews national efforts on non-communicable diseases management and surveillance



WHO Lebanon with the support of WHO EMRO noncommunicable diseases team convened a technical mission to review national efforts and initiatives on noncommunicable diseases management and surveillance. The mission included several visits to different health facilities. During a visit to a primary health care centre in Ras El Metn area, the team discussed the noncommunicable diseases program and proposed recommendations for improvement particularly in management and surveillance.

### WHO procured acute medication with EU in Lebanon support



WHO procured additional quantities of essential medications for acute diseases, with the financial support of the European Union in Lebanon, in close collaboration with Ministry of Public Health Lebanon. The medications were delivered to the Ministry's Central Drug Warehouse to be distributed from there to the national network of 270 Primary Health Care centres across Lebanon, in an effort to strengthen the health system in the context of the multiple crises the country is going through. These acute medications are sufficient till the end of 2023.

### WHO commemorates World Health Day and 75 years of improving public health in Lebanon



The World Health Organization (WHO) in Lebanon has today celebrated its 75th anniversary and World Health Day, as a beacon of hope, resilience and progress in advancing the country's public health and humanitarian efforts. To mark the occasion, WHO held a ceremony at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut under the patronage and in the presence of Dr Firass Abiad, the Minister of Public Health, Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, the WHO Representative in Lebanon, Mr Imran Riza, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr Andreas Kindl, the German Ambassador, and a remarkable number of official and diplomatic figures.

The ceremony started with a short documentary on the history of WHO since the establishment of its presence in Lebanon. The documentary focused on the most important events involving the Organization during the crises of the years before the civil war, through the war and its aftermath, and up to the present day, covering the different emergencies and epidemics.

In his opening speech at the event, Dr Abubakar described WHO's efforts and most significant achievements as a major player in the field of global health over the decades, saying that: "WHO and its partners are working together on multiple fronts to achieve scientific and field programmes that will change the face of the world today. Only joint and continuous

efforts will enable us to achieve Health for All and renew motivation towards achieving health justice. Along with expressing our commitment to improving the health and well-being of the people of Lebanon, we would like to express our gratitude for the unwavering support from our partners, including the government, the Ministry of Public Health, United Nations agencies, nongovernmental organizations and donors, and remain committed to working together for a healthier and more resilient Lebanon."

#### WHO Champion

During the ceremony, WHO nominated Professor Jacques Mokhbat as this year's "Health Champion" to amplify WHO's 75th anniversary campaign, which is running from 1 January 2023 to 7 April 2024.

Dr Mokhbat is a well-known academic and trusted public health expert who has represented Lebanon on several WHO committees at the regional and global levels. He has never hesitated to donate his time and expertise to support the Ministry of Public Health in addressing significant outbreaks of communicable diseases in the country. He is a well-known public figure, always ready to provide the media with health information during emergencies.

## WHO Global response

### WHO advises not to use non-sugar sweeteners for weight control in newly released guideline



Credits +

The World Health Organization (WHO) has released a new guideline on non-sugar sweeteners (NSS), which recommends against the use of NSS to control body weight or reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

The recommendation is based on the findings of a systematic review of the available evidence which suggests that use of NSS does not confer any long-term benefit in reducing body fat in adults or children. Results of the review also suggest that there may be potential undesirable effects from long-term use of NSS, such as an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and mortality in adults.

“Replacing free sugars with NSS does not help with weight control in the long term. People need to consider other ways to reduce free sugars intake, such as consuming food with naturally occurring sugars, like fruit, or unsweetened food and beverages,” says Francesco Branca, WHO Director for Nutrition and Food Safety. “NSS are not essential dietary factors and have no nutritional value. People should reduce the sweetness of the diet altogether, starting early in life, to improve their health.”

The recommendation applies to all people except individuals with pre-existing diabetes and includes all synthetic and naturally occurring or modified non-nutritive sweeteners that are not classified as sugars found in manufactured foods and beverages, or sold on their own to be added to foods and beverages by consumers. Common NSS include acesulfame K, aspartame, advantame, cyclamates, neotame, saccharin, sucralose, stevia and stevia derivatives.

The recommendation does not apply to personal care and hygiene products containing NSS, such as toothpaste, skin cream, and medications, or to low-calorie sugars and sugar alcohols (polyols), which are sugars or sugar derivatives containing calories and are therefore not considered NSS. [Full article here.](#)

**WHO Lebanon would like to thank the support of all partners and donors who have and are still contributing generously and directly to the WHO health response. Together health for all by all.**



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