FESTMIH NOTM



NEWS OF THE MONTH - NOVEMBER 2026

Dear Readers,

November brings the conference season to a close and, with it, some important stocktaking. In our Society Space, **Be-cause health**, the Belgian platform for global health, reports from its international conference "Do we care?", held under FESTMIH patronage at the Egmont Palace in Brussels, where almost 200 participants asked who and what truly defines **quality care in times of polycrisis**.

Our **Good News of the Month** comes from the Caribbean: WHO has certified Barbados for **eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV**, with no new infections among infants born between 2022 and 2024. A second, more mixed piece of good news is **WHO's Global report on neglected tropical diseases** 2026: 63 countries had eliminated at least one NTD by mid-2026, but funding cuts put these gains at risk.

In **Editors' Choice**, a systematic review in Tropical Medicine & International Health pools the diagnostic accuracy of RT-qPCR for chikungunya virus, and we take a critical look at what its near-perfect numbers can and cannot tell us. In Global Health News, the seventh **WHO Global School on Refugee and Migrant** Health (23–27 November) is live-streamed from Madrid and open to all online.

Our Events section covers the **ASTMH Annual Meeting** near Washington, DC, the annual meeting of the Austrian Society for Tropical Medicine, Parasitology and Migration Medicine (**ÖGTPM**) in Vienna, and a save the date for **World NTD Day 2027 in Naples**. We also remind you that the call for organised sessions for **ECTMIH 2027** in Barcelona closes on 15 December. In the Digital section, we introduce a free WHO course on skin conditions in migrants and refugees, including skin NTDs.

There is no Career & Funding section this month. As always, NOTM is at its best when it is community-driven. If you have a call, course, event, publication, or digital resource you would like to see featured in the next edition, please share it with us before the 10th of the month.

Warm regards,
The FESTMIH NOTM Team

TOPICS

Society Space

Be-cause health: Do We Care?

Good News of the Month

Barbados Ends Vertical HIV Transmission
NTD Report: 63 Countries

Editors' Choice & Global Health News

Chikungunya RT-qPCR Accuracy
WHO Global School on Migrant Health

Events

- ASTMH TropMed26
- ÖGTPM Meeting 2026
- World NTD Day 2027
- ECTMIH 2027 Call

Digital

WHO Course: Skin and Migration

https://www.festmih.eu/ secretariat.festmih@gmail.com

SOCIETY SPACE

NEWS FROM BE-CAUSE HEALTH (BELGIUM)

Conference at a glance

- Event: Be-cause health International Conference 2026, “Do we care?”
- Theme: Failing care in times of polycrisis
- Date and venue: 20 October 2026, Egmont Palace, Brussels, and online
- Participants: Almost 200 researchers, practitioners, policymakers and people with lived experience from Africa, Asia and Europe
- Organiser: Be-cause health, the Belgian Platform for Global Health
- Co-host: Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid
- Support and patronage: Belgian Association of Public Health (BAPH); FESTMIH
- Recordings: Now online on the Be-cause health website



Do we care?

Contributed by Be-cause health, the Belgian Platform for Global Health

This month's Society Space comes from Belgium: a report from the Be-cause health 2026 International Conference on failing care in times of polycrisis, held under FESTMIH patronage.

On October 20, almost 200 researchers, practitioners, policymakers and people with lived experience from Africa, Asia and Europe gathered at the Egmont Palace in Brussels, Belgium and online around the fundamental question at the heart of this year’s conference, “Do we care?”: who and what truly defines care, and does it matter?

While health features prominently on many political agendas, the reality for billions of people tells a different story. Medical errors, healthcare-associated infections, and surgical complications remain persistent global challenges, contributing substantially to preventable illness and death. Despite growing efforts to improve quality and patient safety, the burden of poor-quality care remains alarmingly high.

At the same time, market-driven models of care too often prioritize profit over people and volume over value, with insufficient investment in social care, prevention, and long-term support across the care continuum. The climate emergency is a major health crisis. Structural inequalities remain embedded within healthcare systems. Patients and people with lived experience are frequently unheard or insufficiently engaged in decisions that affect them.

The conference brought a powerful message: “In times of polycrisis, quality care must remain equitable, people-centered and accessible to all. The only way forward is integration of human rights based approaches in all our actions, as parallel session and keynote speakers highlighted.” (Stefaan Van Bastelaere, Enabel)

The event was organised by the Be-cause health platform and co-hosted by DG INT, the Directorate General Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, supported by the Belgian Association of Public Health (BAPH), and under patronage of the Federation of European Societies for Tropical Medicine and International Health (FESTMIH).

The recordings from the sessions in the beautiful Europe and Sax rooms are now available on the Be-cause health website. They include the plenary and parallel sessions in the Europe Room and two parallel sessions in the Sax Room: one in French on equity and justice in global care, and one in English on women's agency in care.

"In times of polycrisis, quality care must remain equitable, people-centered and accessible to all."

Stefaan Van Bastelaere, Enabel



Photo: Be-cause health

Watch the conference recordings on the Be-cause health website

FESTMIH NOTM

GOOD NEWS OF THE MONTH

Born Without HIV: Barbados Eliminates Mother-to-Child Transmission

On 30 October, WHO certified Barbados as having eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Between 2022 and 2024, not a single infant born in the country acquired HIV from their mother.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Bridgetown (CaribDigita, public domain)



Key Points

- Certified by WHO on 30 October 2026 after an independent assessment against the global targets.
- No mother-to-child HIV transmission among infants born in 2022–2024.
- 98% coverage of antenatal care, HIV testing and antiretroviral treatment in pregnancy.
- HIV testing and treatment are free for all pregnant women, regardless of nationality.
- Barbados joins 26 countries and territories recognised by WHO for eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis or hepatitis B, or for being on track; 15 of them are in the Americas.

Certification looks well beyond case counts. WHO assesses whether the services behind the result meet global standards: high coverage of antenatal care, HIV testing and treatment, reliable laboratory and data systems, and respect for human rights. In Barbados, testing is voluntary and confidential, and the assessment found no evidence of coercive reproductive health practices.

The model itself is simple and consistently delivered. HIV testing and antiretroviral treatment are free for every pregnant woman, irrespective of nationality, and around 93% of births take place at one public hospital, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Bridgetown, which makes follow-up of mothers and infants easier than in many settings. Barbados committed to the goal in 2010, under PAHO's regional plan of action on HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Barbados is part of a regional trend: the Americas account for the majority of these WHO certifications. The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos were recognised earlier this year, Brazil in 2025, and Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in 2024. In the Americas, this work sits within PAHO's EMTCT Plus framework, which also targets the vertical transmission of syphilis, hepatitis B and Chagas disease, a reminder that eliminating mother-to-child transmission is part of the NTD agenda too.

The work is not finished. To keep its status, Barbados will need sustained investment, updated guidelines, stronger health information systems, wider dual HIV–syphilis testing and better follow-up of women and children. WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus congratulated the country on “protecting a generation of children from HIV”. The task now is to make sure the next generation is protected too.

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GOOD NEWS OF THE MONTH

WHO Global NTD Report 2026: Real Progress at Mid-Term, and a Warning

The good news

WHO's Global report on neglected tropical diseases 2026, published on 4 November as the mid-term evaluation of the 2021–2030 NTD road map, shows what sustained programmes can achieve:

- **Fewer people in need**. The number of people requiring NTD interventions fell to 1.41 billion in 2024, 36% fewer than in 2010 and 19% fewer than in 2020.
- **More countries over the line**. By June 2026, the report's data cut-off, 63 countries had eliminated at least one NTD, up from 42 at the end of 2020, and Togo had become the first country to eliminate four. Further validations have followed since, including Bhutan and Chile for dog-mediated rabies.
- **Diseases in retreat**. Cases of sleeping sickness have fallen by 98% since 1999, and Guinea worm disease reached a record low of 10 human cases in 2025.
- **New tools**. The report highlights WHO-prequalified child-friendly arpraziquantel for schistosomiasis, generic miltefosine for leishmaniasis and a dengue vaccine, while two chikungunya vaccines and new medicines for onchocerciasis and sleeping sickness have received regulatory approval.

Integration is paying off too: 43 countries have adopted integrated strategies for skin NTDs, passing the 2030 target of 40 six years early.

The warning: gains that can be lost

The same report is blunt about what is off track. Only three disease-specific indicators met their 2025 milestones, and the evaluation names five interdependent risks to the 2030 targets, all amplified by the 2025 contraction in financing:

1. Concentrated and declining financing: a few donors provided nearly 80% of international NTD assistance in 2018–2024, and overall NTD resources remain 30% below pre-COVID-19 levels
2. Conflict and climate change
3. Incomplete integration into health systems
4. Gaps in diagnostics and medicines
5. Unmet need among the least-served populations

Dengue reached a record 15.1 million cases in 2024, deaths from vector-borne NTDs have risen, and neither the Guinea worm nor the yaws eradication programme is on track. WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called NTD elimination “one of the standout success stories of global health” and warned that “the hard-won gains we have made could easily be lost”. The report sets out ten strategic priorities for 2026–2030, from domestic financing to integrating NTD services into primary health care.

Read the Report

https://www.festmih.eu/ secretariat.festmih@gmail.com

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EDITORS' CHOICE

Diagnostic Accuracy of Real Time Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction for Chikungunya Virus Detection: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Costa RJ, Marconi CSC, Jesus GK, Franco GO, Silva AM, Arriaga MB, Soares GC, Sardi SI, Netto EM.
Tropical Medicine & International Health (2026) 31(11): 1537–1547. DOI: 10.1111/tmi.70203

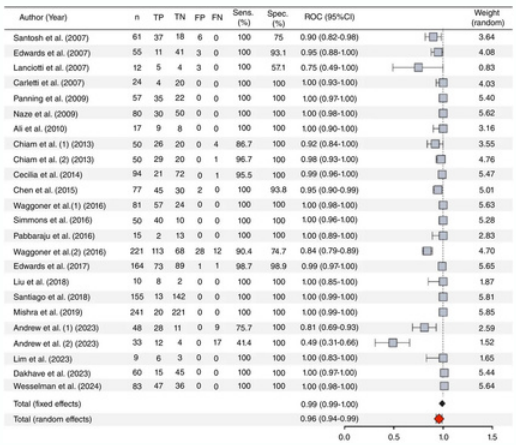


Figure 3: Accuracy per protocol (from the article, CC BY 4.0).

Study at a glance

- Design: Systematic review and meta-analysis of diagnostic accuracy (PRISMA-DTA; PROSPERO CRD42024508661)
- Search: PubMed, LILACS and Web of Science up to December 2024; English, Portuguese and Spanish
- Included: 26 studies with 28 RT-qPCR protocols; 22 studies (24 protocols) in the meta-analysis
- Index test: RT-qPCR for chikungunya virus in acute-phase samples, mostly serum
- Result: Pooled accuracy 96% (95% CI 94–99%); summary sensitivity and specificity 99.7% each; I^2 = 78%; publication bias p = 0.002

Why this matters

Chikungunya is no longer only a tropical concern: autochthonous outbreaks have occurred in France and Italy, and imported cases are routine in European travel clinics. In the acute phase, RT-qPCR is the test of choice, because antibodies are not yet detectable and serological and antigen tests cross-react with related alphaviruses. With multiplex chikungunya, dengue and Zika panels now common, their reliability matters.

What the authors found

Across 24 protocols, pooled accuracy was 96% (95% CI 94–99%), with summary sensitivity and specificity of 99.7%. Specificity was consistently high; the variation lay mainly in sensitivity. Multiplex and singleplex, probe and SYBR Green, commercial and in-house, and one-step and two-step assays performed similarly, although subgroups were small. The weakest results (sensitivity 76% and 41%) came from one study, which the authors attribute to storage of samples at -20 °C.

Read the headline figure with care. In most studies the reference standard was itself an RT-PCR; only five of 28 protocols involved virus isolation. Comparing one PCR with another largely measures agreement between assays, not accuracy against true infection status, and tends to inflate both sensitivity and specificity. In addition, 15 of 26 studies were at high risk of bias in patient selection (case–control designs, archived samples), heterogeneity was high and unexplained (I^2 = 78%), and the funnel plot suggested publication bias (p = 0.002).

Bottom line: RT-qPCR remains the backbone of acute diagnosis, but large prospective studies in consecutive febrile patients, with a robust reference standard, are still missing.

Practical takeaways

- A positive RT-qPCR in an acutely ill patient is highly reliable: specificity was consistently high across studies.
- A negative result does not exclude chikungunya, especially once viraemia falls after the first days of illness. Combine RT-qPCR with IgM serology and consider repeat testing.
- Timing and handling matter. Sample early, and store specimens properly: the weakest results in this review came from samples kept at -20 °C.
- Treat the pooled 99.7% as a best-case figure, since most studies compared one PCR with another.
- For laboratories: validate multiplex arbovirus panels prospectively, in consecutive symptomatic patients and against clearly defined reference standards, exactly as the authors recommend.

Read Article

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GLOBAL HEALTH NEWS

Seventh WHO Global School on Refugee and Migrant Health: Advancing Equity and Inclusion

WHO Health and Migration Programme (PHM) · Hosted by the Ministry of Health of Spain
23–27 November 2026 · Hybrid, live-streamed globally from Madrid



Ministry of Health, Madrid. Photo: Ricardo Ricote Rodríguez, CC BY 2.0

The School at a glance

- Theme: "Advancing equity and inclusion: future directions in refugee and migrant health"
- Dates: 23–27 November 2026, 13:00–14:30 CET
- Format: Hybrid; online participation open to all, in-person attendance in Madrid by invitation only
- Certificate: WHO Certificate of Attendance after completing the daily evaluation surveys
- Reach: Since 2020, more than 20,000 participants from 148 countries

Why this matters

More than one billion people are on the move worldwide, and how health systems treat them is a real test of universal health coverage. For the FESTMIH community, migrant health is everyday work: from imported infections and neglected tropical diseases to access to care, mental health and continuity of treatment across borders.

What the School will cover

This year's edition explores how major structural transformations, including climate change, urbanisation, digital transformation and evolving health financing systems, are reshaping human mobility and its implications for health systems and outcomes. Participants will gain knowledge and tools to examine these trends and to promote evidence-informed, cross-sectoral strategies for equitable and inclusive health systems.

The sessions are particularly relevant for public health professionals, policy-makers and health system planners, researchers and academics, and representatives of NGOs and international organisations. Spain's Secretary of State for Health, Javier Padilla, is among this year's speakers.

Launched in 2020, the Global School is WHO's flagship capacity-building initiative under its Health and Migration Special Initiative and has previously been hosted in Switzerland, Jordan, Bangladesh, Senegal and Colombia.

How to Join

- Online: Free and open to all, via WHO's Zoom webinar
- When: Monday 23 to Friday 27 November 2026, 13:00–14:30 CET
- In person: Ministry of Health, Madrid, by invitation only; seating is limited
- Agenda: A detailed agenda will be published on the WHO event page
- Certificate: Complete the daily evaluation surveys to receive a WHO Certificate of Attendance
- Registration: Via the button below

Register Here

EVENTS



ASTMH 2026 Annual Meeting (TropMed26): 18–22 November, National Harbor, USA

The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH) holds its 2026 Annual Meeting from 18 to 22 November at the Gaylord National Harbor, adjacent to Washington, DC. Under the banner “Advancing Science for Tropical Medicine and Health”, the meeting brings together researchers, clinicians, public health professionals and students from around the world, with more than 150 scientific sessions. As part of the reciprocal partnership between FESTMIH and ASTMH, we are pleased to share it with our community.

Key Information

- Dates: 18–22 November 2026
- Venue: Gaylord National Harbor, 201 Waterfront Street, National Harbor, MD 20745, USA
- Programme: More than 150 scientific sessions; continuing medical education (CME) credits available
- Registration: Open on the ASTMH website; visa support letters available on request
- Looking ahead: The 2027 Annual Meeting takes place from 7 to 11 November 2027 at the Gaylord Rockies, Denver
- Contact: info@astmh.org

More Information

More Information

55th Annual Meeting of the ÖGTPM: 3–5 December 2026, Vienna

The Austrian Society for Tropical Medicine, Parasitology and Migration Medicine (ÖGTPM), a FESTMIH member society, holds its 55th Annual Meeting from 3 to 5 December 2026 in Vienna. The meeting takes place in the Festsaal of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna and brings together the Austrian community working on tropical medicine, parasitology and migration medicine. The preliminary scientific programme, the registration form and the abstract template are available on the ÖGTPM website.

Key Information

- Dates: 3–5 December 2026
- Venue: Festsaal, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Veterinärplatz 1, 1210 Vienna, Austria
- Organiser: Österreichische Gesellschaft für Tropenmedizin, Parasitologie und Migrationsmedizin (ÖGTPM)
- Programme: Preliminary scientific programme available on the ÖGTPM website
- Registration and abstracts: Registration form and abstract template on the ÖGTPM website

EVENTS

Save the Date: World NTD Day 2027 in Naples, 29–30 January 2027

Italy will mark World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day 2027 with a two-day meeting in Naples, promoted by the University of Naples Federico II, the Azienda Ospedaliera dei Colli (Monaldi – Cotugno – C.T.O.) and the Italian Network on Neglected Tropical Diseases (IN-NTD). The draft programme opens on 29 January with an afternoon on One Health and NTDs for veterinarians, medical doctors, biologists and researchers, followed on 30 January by a full day on vector-borne, food- and water-borne and environmental NTDs, global health, and the road to the 2030 targets.

Key Information

- 29 January, 14:30–18:00: "One Health and Neglected Tropical Diseases", Aula Magna, Department of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Production, Via Delpino 1, Naples
- 30 January, 09:00–17:00: Scientific sessions, Aula Magna, Centro Congressi Federico II, Via Partenope, Naples
- Speakers include: Peter Hotez (Baylor College of Medicine) on global NTDs, and Bernadette Abela-Ridder and Denise Mupfasoni (WHO)
- Round table: "Working together to combat NTDs in the run-up to the 2030 goals", with FESTMIH (Marco Albonico) and Italian scientific societies
- Also on show: the photographic exhibition "Forgotten Health: Images to Remember NTDs" by the PINTRE Association
- Status: Draft programme, subject to change; registration details will follow

Save the Date

More Information

ECTMIH 2027 BARCELONA
Refocusing on Global Health

ECTMIH 2027: Session Proposals Due 15 December

A quick reminder: proposals for organised sessions and symposia at ECTMIH 2027, the 15th European Congress on Tropical Medicine and International Health (Barcelona, 25–28 October 2027), can be submitted until 15 December 2026. If you are planning a session, now is the time to confirm your speakers and topics.

Key Information

- Session proposals: 90-minute sessions in English with named speakers and topics, submitted via the online platform by 15 December 2026
- Early bird registration: Until 31 May 2027 (our October issue gave 31 March 2027 in error)

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DIGITAL

Skin and Migration: A Free WHO Course for Front-Line Health Workers

Key Information

- Format: Free, self-paced online course, about 2 hours
- Provider: World Health Organization, on OpenWHO
- Audience: National, district-level and front-line health workers
- Structure: Five modules, from NTDs and migration to skin signs of malnutrition and HIV
- Certificate: Record of achievement and Open Badge (80% pass mark)
- Language: English



Cutaneous leishmaniasis. Photo: CDC/Dr D.S. Martin, public domain

Skin conditions are common among migrants and refugees, and they are often more than skin deep: they can be the first visible sign of an infection, a nutritional deficiency or a neglected tropical disease that clinicians in transit and destination countries rarely see. WHO's free online course “Skin and Migration: Training for national, district-level, and front-line health workers” sets out to close that gap.

Across five modules, the course covers infectious, immunological, inflammatory, neoplastic and environmental skin conditions: global migration trends, the link between NTDs and migration, and how skin disease presents on light and dark skin; pigmentation and inflammatory conditions, including the effects of skin-bleaching creams; infestations, infections and wounds; warning signs of skin NTDs and skin cancer; and the skin signs of malnutrition and HIV.

The course takes around two hours, is entirely self-paced and only requires a free OpenWHO account. With WHO's new NTD report counting 43 countries with integrated strategies for skin NTDs, and the Global School on refugee and migrant health starting on 23 November, it is a timely way to sharpen one of the most practical skills in migrant health: looking closely at the skin.

Free Course

FESTMIH NOTM

CLOSING NOTE

News of the Month, November 2026

Once again, thank you for reading, sharing, and contributing to this edition of the NOTM. November takes us from Barbados, where children are now being born free of HIV, to WHO's sobering mid-term review of the NTD road map, and from Madrid, where the WHO Global School puts refugee and migrant health in focus, to Naples, where World NTD Day 2027 is already taking shape.

Some dates come up fast. The ASTMH Annual Meeting starts on 18 November, the WHO Global School on 23 November and the ÖGTPM Annual Meeting on 3 December. Proposals for organised sessions at ECTMIH 2027 close on 15 December; if you are planning one, please do not leave it to the last week.

Our thanks go to Be-cause health for filling this month's Society Space. If your society has news, a congress report, a position paper or a project looking for partners, we would be glad to feature it in a future edition.

Until next month,
The FESTMIH NOTM Team

SHARE YOUR EVENTS & FEEDBACK

Do you have an upcoming event from within your institution, society, or network that you would like to see featured in the News of the Month? We invite our cooperation partners to share relevant announcements with the FESTMIH Secretariat. Submissions received before the 10th of each month will be considered for inclusion in the following edition.

We also value your thoughts on the NOTM. You can provide feedback anytime by simply scanning the QR code included in this newsletter. Your contributions and ideas help us keep the NOTM a vibrant and useful resource for the FESTMIH community.

https://www.festmih.eu/ secretariat.festmih@gmail.com