



Neglected tropical diseases: defending global health

‘Unite, Act and Eliminate’. To join forces, take action and eliminate neglected tropical diseases: this is the call relaunched by the World Health Organisation on World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day 2026. AIFA wholeheartedly supports this appeal, calling on the international community to share responsibility for maintaining awareness of diseases that continue to affect millions of people around the world, as demonstrated by the symbolic lighting of its headquarters.

‘We live in a world where people are increasingly on the move, and diseases travel with them: infections that we have long considered distant can now quickly reach new territories,’ said AIFA President Robert Nisticò, ‘making constant, coordinated and global attention by health systems essential.’

Neglected tropical diseases comprise a large group of diseases caused by viruses, bacteria, protozoa, parasites, fungi and toxins, affecting around one billion people worldwide. Historically marginalised in the global health agenda, they continue to have a significant health, social and economic impact, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, also placing a burden on patients’ families in terms of disability, social exclusion and loss of productivity.

Climate change and the increasing mobility of people, animals and goods characterise the global context in which tropical diseases, as they are transmissible, are no longer limited to low-income countries but also affect our latitudes, including Italy.

Confirming this trend, from 1 January to 23 December 2025, the national surveillance system of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (National Institute of Health) recorded 469 confirmed cases of chikungunya and 217 cases of dengue fever. ‘The data on chikungunya show how these infections can now directly affect our country,’ added President Nisticò, ‘reinforcing the need to invest in prevention, epidemiological surveillance, diagnostic capabilities and scientific research.’

The WHO roadmap for 2021-2030 fits into this scenario. By December 2025, 58 countries had eliminated at least one NTD and 84 elimination processes had been completed and recognised. In 2024, over 880 million people received treatment for NTDs, supported by one of the world’s largest drug donation programmes. Between 2011 and 2025, over 31 billion tablets and vials were distributed to countries.

Alongside the WHO’s efforts, the European Medicines Agency, through tools such as Scientific Advice, the PRIME procedure and the EU-M4all Programme, promotes accelerated pathways for the development of and access to innovative vaccines and therapies, particularly for low- and middle-income countries. In this context, the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) has recently issued opinions on medicines for schistosomiasis and trypanosomiasis, while new products for chikungunya and dengue are currently being evaluated. However, pharmacological interventions remain only part of the response to neglected tropical diseases, which requires integrated public health actions, vector control, access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene promotion. Global progress shows that the elimination of NTDs is a realistic goal that requires continued commitment, international cooperation and stable investment over time.