

# COLOMBIA

*An Opportunity to Improve the Health of Communities, Women, and Children in the Americas*

## PARTNERSHIP TO ELIMINATE TRACHOMA AS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

**Colombia advances regional efforts to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem**

In Colombia, more than 234 000 people require interventions to eliminate trachoma in the six endemic districts identified in the country.

Since 2012, integrated actions for trachoma elimination have been implemented in the departments of Amazonas, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Vichada. Colombia has a national plan to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem and is working in close coordination with local authorities. However, it faces challenges in carrying out activities in affected communities.

### What is ocular trachoma?

Ocular trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide. It is an eye infection transmitted by direct contact with people infected with *Chlamydia trachomatis* bacteria.



Recurrent infections in children living in communities with poor access to health services, water, and basic sanitation can lead to **chronic damage**, known as trachomatous trichiasis (TT). Inversion of the eyelashes is painful and, if left untreated, can result in visual impairment and blindness in people when they reach adulthood.

In the Region of the Americas, **5.6 million people are at risk of trachoma in four countries (Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, and Peru)**. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is promoting efforts to determine whether trachoma is a health problem in other countries in the Region.

## How has the problem been addressed in Colombia?

To eliminate trachoma, the World Health Organization (WHO) developed the SAFE strategy, which consists of four core components: **S-** surgery, to correct trachomatous trichiasis (TT); **A-** antibiotics (mass administration); **F-** facial hygiene; and **E-**environment (improving environmental conditions).

The country has made the following progress:

**S-component:** training basic health teams to take an integrated approach to the identification of TT cases; strengthening the information system for the reporting, consolidation, purging, and analysis of TT case data; strengthening the human resources

in charge of surgeries and the planning and implementation of surgery campaigns.

**A-component:** improving the mass drug administration strategy, with increased coverage and strengthening of the information system.

**F-component:** developing socio-culturally adapted educational materials with community participation in order to promote facial and hand hygiene, and to promote the washing and personal use of items such as towels, bed linen, and clothing to prevent the transmission of infection.

**E-component:** promoting the use of latrines and toilets and conducting waste management campaigns.





## What actions will be taken in Colombia to step up efforts to eliminate trachoma?

Through the partnership and collaboration between the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance of Colombia, the Government of Canada, and PAHO, the following actions will be carried out over five years, starting in 2024:

- Advocacy with national and local authorities and other stakeholders on the importance of interventions to eliminate trachoma.
- Implementation of educational strategies with an intercultural approach to trachoma prevention.
- Planning and implementation of SAFE strategy activities.
- Strengthening of the information system.
- Implementation of surveillance-related activities such as the design of a population-based survey to evaluate the impact of SAFE activities in endemic areas.

The trachoma elimination initiative is aligned with PAHO's policy and initiative for the elimination of communicable diseases and related conditions, which **aims to eliminate more than 30 diseases by 2030** with a common, integrated, sustainable approach that promotes linkages and synergies, both within the health system and with other sectors.

## What are the expected results of the partnership?

Colombia will generate evidence by measuring the impact of implementation of the SAFE strategy.

Implementation of SAFE strategy activities will benefit vulnerable communities in five departments, reducing the potential risk of visual impairment and blindness.

National and subnational capacities to provide health services with comprehensive, intercultural, and gender-sensitive approaches will be strengthened.

