

## COLOMBIA

# Initiative for the Elimination of Trachoma in the Americas

*A platform to bring  
comprehensive health care  
to the most vulnerable  
communities*

### Colombia contributes to the elimination of trachoma in the Americas

In Colombia, more than 200 000 people still require interventions to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem, primarily in the Amazon and Orinoquía regions. These territories are home to predominantly Indigenous and rural populations, with widely dispersed communities and limited access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. Conditions that may facilitate disease transmission persist in these areas, where health system interventions intersect with ancestral knowledge.

Ocular trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide. In the Americas, Mexico eliminated the disease as a public health problem in 2017, followed by El Salvador in July 2026. Guatemala and Paraguay are the countries closest to validating the elimination of the disease, which remains a public health problem in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru.

Other countries, such as Bolivia and Venezuela, have communities that may require interventions. Meanwhile, the disease is suspected to be present in Ecuador, Guyana, and Panama. It is important to implement surveillance measures in these countries to confirm whether or not the condition is a public health problem.

A partnership between the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Government of Canada aims not only to eliminate trachoma but also, through the integration of activities, to strengthen primary healthcare services in the most vulnerable communities, build the capacity of Ministry of Health workers in the 12 participating countries, and demonstrate the value of international cooperation in achieving more resilient health systems and a better future for all.

The initiative is aligned with PAHO's efforts to eliminate more than 30 diseases and related conditions by 2030, through an integrated and sustainable approach that promotes collaboration across sectors and within health systems.

## What are Colombia's main advances toward the elimination of trachoma?

Since 2012, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MSPS) of Colombia has been promoting integrated actions to eliminate trachoma in the departments of Amazonas, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Vichada, within the framework of a National Plan and in close coordination with local authorities. These interventions are based on the SAFE strategy (S: surgery for advanced cases, A: antibiotic treatment, F: promotion of facial hygiene, and E: improved access to water and sanitation), a comprehensive approach recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem. Although the country is making progress, challenges remain in implementing actions in affected communities, particularly due to access issues and widely dispersed communities.

Colombia has achieved the following:

- **Surveillance activities:** Design of protocols and planning of epidemiological surveys that will provide insight into the impact of implementing SAFE strategy actions on the prevalence of the disease in priority areas.
- **Strengthening the comprehensive care approach:** Expansion of the scope of interventions beyond trachoma through the integration of care for other neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and priority conditions. Integrated actions in the Vaupés department have included eye care, prevention of canine and human rabies, as well as diagnosis and treatment of malaria and NTDs such as Chagas disease, scabies, leishmaniasis, and tungiasis.
- **Interagency collaboration:** Coordination between MSPS, the Vaupés Department of Health, nongovernmental organizations (GoodVision, Aldeia em Foco), and the Colombian Society of Ophthalmology.
- **Incorporation of intercultural and gender approaches:** Implementation of the Knowledge Dialogues Methodology to strengthen the components of the SAFE strategy, building the capacities of health workers, Indigenous authorities, and traditional healers through the training of facilitators in the departments of Amazonas, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Vichada.
- **Interventions under Component A:** Mass administration of azithromycin with coverage exceeding 80% in the department of Vaupés.
- **Health education and communication:** Design of an educational strategy for the prevention and control of NTDs, vector-borne diseases, and zoonoses in indigenous communities in the department of Vaupés.
- **Strengthening of health teams in the integration of WASH interventions:** More than 580 people completed an online course entitled "Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and health: Working together."

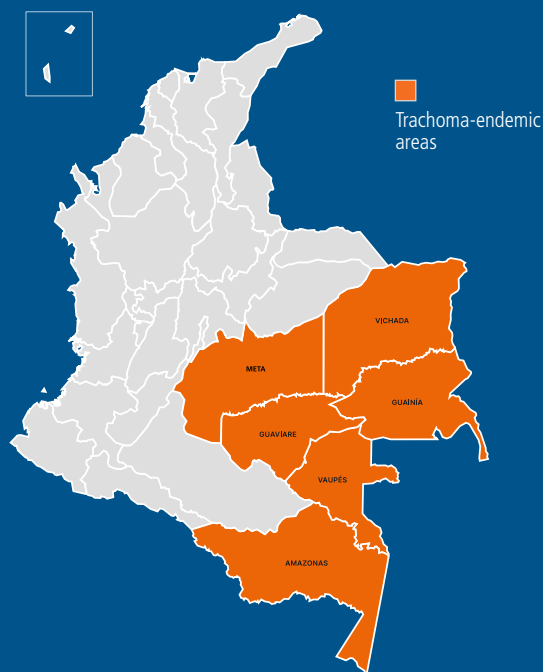




## What key actions will Colombia take to accelerate trachoma elimination?

Colombia will carry out the following actions:

- **Surveillance activities:** Conducting impact assessment surveys in endemic areas.
- **Surgeries for advanced trachoma cases:** Coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the surgical component of the SAFE strategy for advanced trachoma cases.
- **Strengthen the health education and communication strategy:** Distribute educational toolkits and promote preventive and control measures for ocular trachoma and other important neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) among schoolchildren and teachers in the department of Vaupés.
- **Moving toward the regional and global goal:** Strengthen the actions needed to move toward the validation of the elimination of trachoma as a public health problem in Colombia.



Learn more about the comprehensive health approach in the following video. Scan the QR code to view it.  
[Colombia: Integrated approach to disease management. Bringing comprehensive health care to remote communities in the Amazon](#)

For more information, see: <https://www.paho.org/en/topics/trachoma>