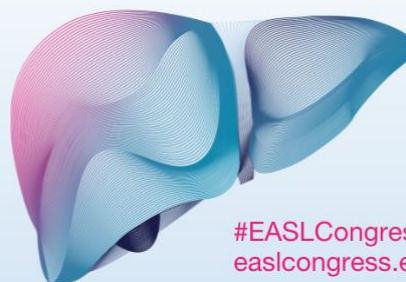




The International Liver Congress™



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Media Release

Liver disease threatening to become Europe’s biggest health challenge of the 21st Century: 8,000 scientists, decision makers and representatives of industry and affected communities attending the world’s largest gathering on hepatology in Vienna, Austria this week.

EASL Congress 2023 to feature major scientific breakthroughs around the treatment of inflammatory and metabolic liver diseases - like fatty liver disease -, cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Major focus of the congress will be also on prevention and early detection – 90% of liver disease deaths are avoidable.

Wednesday, 21 June 2023 (Vienna, Austria) - Scientists gathering at the biggest international liver conference in Vienna this week will reiterate the urgency to step up the pace of prevention efforts around liver disease to in order to leverage the rapid advances in detection technologies taking place across the field of hepatology.

“We are at the crossroads of opportunity, but also the risk of failure,” said **Thomas Berg**, Secretary-General of the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) and Head of the Department of Hepatology at the University Hospital in Leipzig, Germany.

Berg was addressing the Official Opening Press Conference on the first day of the [EASL Congress 2023](#) taking place this week at the Messe Wien in Vienna, Austria. Some 8,000 scientists, doctors, public health officials, industry representatives and affected communities from around 120 countries are attending the event which runs through until Saturday June 24. The congress is convened annually by the [European Association for the Study of the Liver \(EASL\)](#).

“Liver health is a window to the general health challenges of Europe in the 21st century and common risk factors for liver disease reflect behaviours and conditions that are the consequence of both unhealthy environments and social inequities that straddle a wide range of associated medical conditions such as diabetes and cancer,” said Berg.

“The medical profession needs to change its approach to liver disease: instead of focusing on the management of end-stage complications, it needs to shift towards prevention, proactive case-finding with early identification of progressive liver fibrosis, early diagnosis and early treatment. Therapeutic nihilism for liver diseases belongs to the past.

Each year, almost 300,000 people in Europe die prematurely due to problems of the liver and many of them could have lived longer and healthier lives because today in most

European countries, there is good access to secondary care. In most cases, liver disease can be prevented.

To that end EASL launched earlier this week in Vienna *Love Your Liver*, a promotional campaign aimed at increasing awareness of liver health across the city. On Monday a number of Austrian hepatologists accompanied by local and international media outlets, visited a local high school to teach young children about the body's largest organ, its function and the importance of keeping it healthy. The children then created posters around liver health promotion which will be displayed throughout the week at the conference.

EASL also organised a Town Hall public forum in the city on Tuesday which featured Austrian TV personality **Eser Akbaba** moderating a panel of doctors, experts and patients discussing the importance of liver health for people living in Vienna and across Austria.

"Due to our hypercaloric diet and considerable alcohol consumption, we are seeing a growing rate of fatty liver disease in Austria, which is problematic because it is also a driver of cardiovascular diseases and cancer," said **Thomas Reiberger**, Professor of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Vienna General Hospital, associated with the Medical University of Vienna.

"Given the considerable burden of liver disease in Austria, it's urgent that the medical profession and policy makers in Austria unite to increase public awareness around liver disease and most importantly, promote its prevention."

Machines that scan for liver disease severity are available at emergency wards in hospitals but are rarely found in GP clinics where they are much needed for early detection. To promote awareness of this kind of service, EASL has organised for a mobile scanning unit staffed by nurses to be stationed nearby the Messe Wien for the duration of the Congress and is encouraging members of the public to drop by for a scan.

[Europe has the highest rates of alcohol consumption per person](#), the highest prevalence of heavy episodic drinking, and the lowest rates of abstinence from alcohol in the world. Alcohol combines synergistically with obesity and other risk factors for liver disease to drive the current high rates of end-stage liver disease and liver cancer. [Alcohol causes about 40 per cent of the 287,000 premature liver-related deaths in Europe](#) every year, although the true number might be higher.

Fatty liver disease (NAFLD), mainly driven by obesity and diabetes, is now the fastest growing liver disease in Europe with [one in three people](#) now living with the condition and set to become the number one cause of liver cancer on the continent. Some exciting results from two Phase III trials of new drugs to treat fatty liver disease will be presented at the congress this week along with some breakthrough studies involving faecal transplants and the opioid drug naltrexone to achieving alcohol abstinence in patients with cirrhosis.

Impact of the Russian invasion on Ukraine's health infrastructure

Vienna is often considered as a city that bridges between East and West Europe and the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is being felt across the continent. **Tetiana Deshko**, Director of Programs at the Alliance for Public Health Ukraine, today addressed journalists at the Official Opening Press Conference and described the impact that the war is having on the delivery and maintenance of hepatitis and health services across Ukraine.

"The Russian invasion has brought enormous challenges to the Ukrainian health system because war puts the most vulnerable at vastly more risk," said Deshko.

"Ukraine has succeeded in maintaining core health services in large part due to the selfless commitment of civil society. We fight for our people and our communities and our victory will be our prize."

ENDS

Further Information

Media Registration: Accredited media can apply for free registration [here](#)

Programme: For updates to the congress programme see [here](#)

Press Programme: All EASL Congress 2023 Official Press Conferences held onsite will also be broadcast live on Zoom for registered media.

Embargo Policy: Media representatives are asked to familiarise themselves with the official policy EASL Congress 2023 [Embargo Policy](#)

Further Information:

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About [EASL Congress 2023](#)

EASL Congress (previously known as the International Liver Congress) is EASL's flagship event, attracting scientific and medical experts from around the world to learn about the latest in liver research and exchange clinical experience. Attending specialists present, share, debate and conclude on the latest science and research in hepatology, working to enhance the treatment and management of liver disease in clinical practice.

About The [European Association for the Study of the Liver \(EASL\)](#)

Since its foundation in 1966, this not-for-profit organisation has grown to over 5,200 members from all over the world, including many of the leading hepatologists in Europe and beyond. EASL is the leading liver association in Europe, having evolved into a major European association with international influence, and with an impressive track record in promoting research in liver disease, supporting wider education, and promoting changes in European liver policy.