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WHO releases 'watch list' of health-threatening fungi

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Report to guide global effort to address once overlooked group



The World Health Organisation (WHO) has published its first-ever list of fungal 'priority pathogens' - a catalogue of 19 fungi that represent the greatest threat to public health. This report is based on research led by the University of Sydney in Australia.

The WHO is placing fungi that cause diseases (fungal pathogens) in the spotlight, with a global report calling for the public and researchers to pay more attention to this overlooked group.

The WHO Fungal Priority Pathogens List ranks 19 species of highest concern, which require the greatest research and funding investment. The area of fungal diseases receives less than 1.5 percent of all infectious disease research funding. As a result, the true burden of disease caused by fungus is unknown, and there is limited evidence behind current treatment guidelines in healthcare.

At the top of the list are fungal species threatening healthcare that are already or have increasing resistance to antifungal agents, such as *Aspergillus fumigatus* and *Candida Auris*.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the incidence of at least three deadly fungal pathogens increased – comorbid aspergillosis, mucormycosis and candidemia. Evidence is also starting to suggest that the incidence and geographic range of fungal diseases are increasing worldwide due to climate change.

There are only four classes of anti-fungal medicines currently available, with only a few drugs currently undergoing clinical trials. In addition, methods to diagnose fungal infection or detect drug resistance are not widely available globally.