

Fifth annual meeting of the network of Buruli ulcer PCR laboratories (BU-LABNET) in the WHO African Region

23–25 October 2023

Venue: Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, Accra, Ghana

The BU-LABNET will hold its fifth annual meeting in Accra, Ghana, on 23-25 October 2023. This hybrid (physical and virtual) meeting is expected to bring together about 60 participants (network member laboratories, partners and skin disease experts) to take stock of progress since the last meeting in October 2022 and identify ways to implement the integrated control and management of skin diseases in line with the [WHO NTD road map 2021–2030](#) and the [Skin NTD Framework](#) and thus realize the vision of Skin Health for All. [Diagnostics](#) and [laboratory](#) capacity strengthening have received global and regional support in 2023 recognizing their central roles in the universal health coverage.

The meeting will be organized by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana, Ministry of Health, Ghana Health Service and the BU-LABNET Coordinating Centre at the Pasteur Centre of Cameroon.

BU-LABNET was established in 2019 under the auspices of WHO. This network of 13 laboratories from nine endemic countries (Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo), including external experts, is supported by WHO, American Leprosy Missions, the Anesvad Foundation (Spain) and the Raoul Follereau Foundation (France).

The objective of the network is to improve diagnosis of Buruli ulcer with polymerase chain reaction (PCR) among member laboratories using standardized testing protocols, involving external quality assurance programmes. The network also has a long-term goal of including other skin NTDs in the same molecular platform. These so-called skin NTDs¹ all require similar detection and case-management approaches that present opportunities for integration, which both increases cost-effectiveness and expands coverage.

Since the first meeting in 2019, two other annual meetings have been held virtually (in July 2020 and December 2021), owing to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Due to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the fourth annual meeting was held in person in Yaoundé, Cameroon on 24–26 October 2022.

¹ Buruli ulcer, cutaneous leishmaniasis, leprosy, lymphatic filariasis, mycetoma, chromoblastomycosis and other deep mycoses, onchocerciasis, post-kala azar dermal leishmaniasis, scabies and other ectoparasitoses, yaws.

The network has achieved several milestones including successful harmonization of BU testing procedures for all member laboratories, implementation of two external quality assessment (EQA) rounds, and evaluation visits to 12 of these laboratories. With support from partners, BU PCR reagents and consumables have been donated to the laboratories for routine testing. The major highlight of the fifth annual meeting will be to expand the activities of the network to include yaws, cutaneous leishmaniasis, mycetoma and leprosy and extend its scope to other laboratories.

Objectives of the meeting

- To review the progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the October 2022 BU-LABNET annual meeting;
- To present the activities carried out towards the integration of other skin NTDs onto the BU PCR platform;
- To review and adopt the draft harmonized PCR procedures for other skin NTDs;
- To discuss communication and advocacy activities to promote the network; and
- To plan activities for 2024.

Expected outcomes

- Progress from the October 2022 meeting presented and discussed;
- Harmonized yaws, cutaneous leishmaniasis, mycetoma and leprosy PCR procedures adopted for implementation;
- Advocacy and communication activities identified; and
- Planned activities for 2024 agreed upon.

Participation

About 60 participants from Ghana and abroad are expected to attend the meeting, including:

- BU-LABNET member laboratories,
- the BU-LABNET Coordinating Centre,
- external BU laboratory experts and partners,
- other skin NTD experts and laboratories, as well as representatives from
- the Ghana Health Service,
- the WHO Country Office in Ghana,
- the WHO Regional Office for Africa,
- the WHO Global Leprosy Programme and
- WHO headquarters.

Registration

To join online, please complete the [zoom registration](#).

Languages

The meeting will be conducted in English and French with simultaneous interpretation.