

## World Malaria Day, 25 April 2020

### *Talking points*

### **COVID-19 and the need to sustain investments in the malaria fight and protect health systems**

Severe disruptions in insecticide treated mosquito net campaigns and in access to antimalarials due to COVID-19 could lead to a surge in malaria cases and a doubling of malaria deaths this year, increasing the burden on challenged health systems, according to a new modelling analysis by WHO, in close collaboration with partners including PATH, the Malaria Atlas Project, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

We can save hundreds of thousands of lives – especially those most vulnerable, children under 5 who make up 2/3 of malaria deaths and pregnant women – prevent additional strain on health systems and protect the gains of anti-malaria efforts-to-date. Countries and partners are working together to safely move ahead with anti-malaria programmes, where and when possible.

#### **Recommendations for countries:**

- Sustain and, where possible, increase investments in the malaria fight, which will benefit the COVID-19 response
- Ahead of the rainy season, get as many prevention campaigns done and as many people protected as possible with effective vector control (ITNs and IRS) and preventive therapies for pregnant women and children (SMC, ITPp, IPTi)
- Maintain access to essential health services that lead to early diagnosis and treatment of malaria, which prevents malaria cases from becoming severe and requiring hospitalization
- Get the word out about the importance of sleeping under mosquito nets, staying safe and seeking treatment when you have a fever
- Provide Community Health Workers with PPE so they can conduct campaigns safely, patients can get treated at home or be treated safely at health clinics
- Coordinate among partners to ensure drugs and tools are where they're needed most

#### **Taking action:**

- Several countries have already heeded the call to continue their planned malaria programmes while taking precautionary measures against COVID-19, including Benin, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Niger, and Sierra Leone, which are going ahead with their mass distribution campaigns of ITNs
- Kenya, Ghana and Malawi are continuing to immunize children against malaria through a pilot malaria vaccine programme announced on World Malaria Day last year.
- Amidst COVID-19 outbreak, Malaysia, which has registered zero indigenous malaria cases since 2018, provided a guidance on tailoring malaria response in the country to avoid resurgence.
- Haiti has put in place a COVID-19 response plan and is working to secure adequate resources and ensure that malaria activities are not interrupted.

#### **Current investments in ending malaria are saving nearly 600,000 lives compared to 2000 levels and building capacity and helping health systems fight malaria and emerging diseases like COVID-19 by:**

- training tens of thousands of health care workers to conduct early diagnosis and treatment and integrated community case management of people with malaria/fevers
- increasing access to life-saving treatments, rapid diagnostics and preventive interventions
- building data systems to improve real-time surveillance of infectious diseases
- improving supply chains and availability of effective medicines and medical equipment
- building in-country lab capacity

## Current and potential impact of COVID-19

- suspend distribution campaigns of insecticide-treated mosquito nets that are estimated to have prevented more than 2/3 (68%) of malaria cases in sub-Saharan Africa since 2000
- limit access to essential health services and prevent community health workers from conducting testing and providing anti-malarials that lead to early diagnosis and treatment of malaria
  - Without access to early treatment, a mild case of malaria can rapidly progress to severe illness and death
  - In 2018, children under 5 accounted for 2/3 of all malaria deaths and an estimated 1 in 3 pregnant women in sub-Saharan Africa were infected with malaria
- discourage people with fevers to seek effective and life-saving treatment
- disrupt the supply chain of anti-malarials and proven malaria interventions, (RDTs, ITNs, IRS, SMC)
- lack of PPE to protect and enable frontline health workers to go into communities/door-to-door and do effective integrated community case management and be able to treat people safely at health clinics

## World Malaria Day: Talking Points

1. ZERO MALARIA STARTS WITH ME
2. MARKING PROGRESS AGAINST MALARIA
3. STEPPING UP THE FIGHT
4. MALARIA INNOVATION
5. MALARIA'S IMPACT ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN
6. CLOSING THE FUNDING GAP
7. MALARIA AND UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE
8. FROM HIGH BURDEN TO HIGH IMPACT
9. MALARIA ELIMINATION IN THE AMERICAS

### 1. Zero Malaria Starts with Me

- The theme of World Malaria Day 2020 — Zero Malaria Starts with Me — is a movement dedicated to driving action and making change, and this starts with each and every one of us.
- In 2020, World Malaria Day will highlight, recognize and revitalize the involvement of high-burden countries in Africa, which account for about 70% of the global malaria burden. Involving political decision-makers, the private sector, civil society, the academic community and the public, World Malaria Day 2020 will highlight, recognize and revitalize malaria control and elimination efforts across the globe.
- In 2018, African Union leaders endorsed “Zero Malaria Starts with Me”, a continent-wide campaign co-led by the African Union Commission and the RBM Partnership to End Malaria, to get more people involved in the fight against the disease that kills 400,000 Africans every year.
- Since 2018, fourteen African nations have joined the Zero Malaria Starts with Me movement, with more expected to follow later this year.

### 2. Marking progress against malaria

- Since 2000, sustained global investments have driven malaria cases and deaths to historically low levels, saving 7 million lives and preventing more than 1 billion malaria cases. In most parts of the

world, a child who gets malaria today has a better chance of survival than at any other point in history.

- Half the world is malaria-free, and today, more countries than ever before are close to elimination.
  - Algeria, Argentina, Uzbekistan and Paraguay have all been certified malaria-free over the past two years.
  - At least 10 countries that are part of the WHO “E-2020” initiative are on track to reach the 2020 elimination milestone of the global malaria strategy, including Algeria, Belize, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, China, El Salvador, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Suriname and Timor-Leste.
  - Globally, the elimination net is widening, with more countries moving towards zero indigenous cases. In 2018, 49 countries reported fewer than 10 000 such cases, up from 46 countries in 2017 and 40 countries in 2010. The number of countries with fewer than 100 indigenous cases – a strong indicator that elimination is within reach – increased from 17 countries in 2010 to 25 countries in 2017 and 27 countries in 2018.
- In the Greater Mekong Subregion, where anti-malaria drug resistance poses a challenge, the number of malaria cases has fallen by 76% since 2010 and deaths have plummeted by 95%.
- Several countries with a high burden of malaria have also achieved significant reductions in malaria cases. India reported 2.6 million fewer malaria cases in 2018 over the previous year, while Uganda reported 1.5 million fewer cases.

### 3. Stepping Up the Fight

- Despite remarkable progress, every two minutes a child still dies of malaria. Malaria is increasingly a disease of poverty and inequity, with the most vulnerable at greatest risk of dying from a mosquito bite. Today, half the world remains at risk of malaria – 405,000 people died in 2018 from the disease and more than 90% of cases and deaths are concentrated in Africa.
- In recent years, global progress in reducing malaria infections and deaths has levelled off, particularly in countries with a high burden of malaria. Stepped up action is critical to stay ahead of an evolving parasite, save and improve millions more lives and unlock trillions of dollars in economic potential.

### 4. Malaria innovation

- Thanks to an array of innovations, including long-lasting insecticidal nets, rapid diagnostic testing and artemisinin-based combination therapies, as well as the improved use of data for a better targeting and delivery of these interventions, countries and their development partners have been able to prevent, detect and treat millions of malaria cases around the globe.
- In 2020, global malaria partners working together achieved the distribution of 2 billion insecticide-treated mosquito nets since 2004. These life-saving nets were responsible for almost 70% of the malaria cases prevented in Africa between 2000 and 2015.
- Two landmark reports on malaria eradication confirm that a malaria-free world can and should be achieved, and that the benefits of malaria eradication will greatly exceed the investment needed to reach it. This will only be possible with increased investment in researching, developing and scaling up transformative tools to combat growing drug and insecticide resistance and to prepare us for the next set of challenges in the malaria fight.
- Innovative tools and training to detect and diagnose communicable and fever-related diseases reach beyond malaria.

## 5. Malaria's impact on women and children

- Malaria strikes hardest against pregnant women and children in sub-Saharan Africa. We must prioritize reaching these groups with life-saving interventions, to help stop the cycle of extreme poverty by keeping everyone healthy, children in school and ensuring more sustainable livelihoods.
- While malaria deaths in children under five dropped in 2018, children under five still accounted for two-thirds (67%) of all malaria deaths worldwide.
- In 2018 an estimated 11 million pregnant women (1 in 3) were infected with malaria in 38 countries across sub-Saharan Africa; as a result, nearly 900 000 children were born with a low birthweight, a leading cause of child mortality.
  - Intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy (IPTp) with quality-assured sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP) has been proven as a cost-effective tool in preventing maternal and neonatal deaths, and reduces maternal malaria episodes, maternal and fetal anaemia, and low birthweight.
  - In 2020, the RBM Malaria in Pregnancy Working Group will launch the #speedupscaleup campaign to rally a larger community of stakeholders to bring this lifesaving intervention to all eligible women in sub-Saharan Africa.

## 6. Closing the funding gap

- Every year, global investments and political will to prioritize fighting malaria make a significant difference - without these, malaria deaths and cases would be significantly higher. Yet more funding is needed to close the \$2 bn a year gap in funding to reach all those at risk with the life-saving malaria tools they need.
- New ALMA chair President Kenyatta has called on African leaders to join him in establishing at least 15 End Malaria Councils and Funds to boost high-level, multi-sectoral engagement and advocacy at country level while increasing domestic resource mobilization. He also committed to engage Africa's regional economic blocs to address key challenges and provide solutions in the fight against malaria.
- Last year, countries pledged a record amount to fully fund the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria for the next 3 years. These funds are critical to reaching millions with life-saving malaria interventions and making progress toward the goal of halving malaria in Commonwealth countries by 2023.

## 7. Malaria and Universal Health Coverage

- Guaranteeing everyone at risk of malaria has access to effective malaria prevention, diagnosis and treatment will accelerate progress, strengthen health systems and contribute to achieving the global goal of Universal Health Coverage.
- Robust health systems are our primary line of defense. Community health workers who test and treat people for malaria and other infectious diseases also form an extensive network for surveillance and response to new diseases threats.
- Innovative tools and training to detect and diagnose fever-related diseases detect communicable diseases reach beyond malaria.

## 8. From high burden to high impact

- Stepped-up action is needed across all endemic countries, particularly in countries hardest hit by malaria. The country-led "[High burden to high impact](#)" approach, spearheaded by WHO and the RBM Partnership to End Malaria, provides a response that can help ensure future success in malaria control.
- The response is being led by 11 countries that, together, account for approximately 70% of the world's malaria burden: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, India, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania
- Nigeria – the continent's most densely populated nation – has a hugely important role to play in tackling this deadly disease. Representing a quarter of the world's estimated 228 million annual cases of malaria, Nigeria is the country hardest hit by the disease. Despite significant reductions in 2018, Nigeria still accounts for the highest number of malaria-related deaths in the world, most of them in children under the age of five.

## 9. Malaria elimination in the Americas

- The Americas region is at a critical crossroads. Targeted investments in the Americas to fill gaps in malaria programming would propel the elimination effort forward, taking a large step toward global malaria eradication. Relapsing malaria is the predominant form of malaria in the Americas, where it causes 75% of cases, as well as in South-East Asia: a radical cure for relapsing malaria aimed to eliminate the parasite from the liver and block transmission will be crucial to dramatically decrease morbidity and achieve the malaria elimination targets in both continents".
- The crisis in Venezuela accounts for a sharp uptick in malaria cases in the Americas region. In one year, from 2016 to 2017, the country saw more than a 170% increase in reported cases, and now accounts for 53% of all known cases in the region.
- This year, Venezuela has received a \$19.8-million allocation from the Global Fund for a 3-year malaria grant, the first non-"emergency" Global Fund funding that the country has received. Efforts to combat malaria in Venezuela must be scaled up through this grant; the cost of inaction and the risk of resurgence of the disease exacerbated by a growing crisis in Venezuela could result in a reversal of progress made to date.