

MEDIA RELEASE

Malaria: Eliminate it

Eliminating malaria is both possible and necessary. Here's how to accelerate progress



The WHO South-East Asia Region has made dramatic progress in malaria prevention and control. As the recently released World Malaria Report documents, since 2010 the South-East Asia Region has led the world in reducing the number of people falling ill and dying from malaria, slashing the caseload by 50% and associated mortality by 60%. In addition, two countries in the Region – Maldives and Sri Lanka – have been certified malaria-free. In 2016 four countries recorded fewer than 10 000 cases, while Bhutan and Timor-Leste reported zero deaths since 2013 and 2015 respectively.

These are substantial achievements, particularly in a world where the battle against malaria remains as challenging as ever. That eight of the Region's nine malaria endemic countries are on course to reduce malaria cases by 40% by 2020 (with three countries – Bhutan, Nepal and Timor-Leste – identified as having the potential to achieve elimination) is proof that with the right policies and robust political will, malaria's deadly burden can be lifted.

To make that happen Region-wide by 2030, high-burden countries such as India, Indonesia and Myanmar must continue their forward trajectory. While each has made substantial gains in driving down malaria incidence and mortality, their further success will have a decisive impact on the Region's fortunes given that together they account for around 98% of its burden. More importantly, they will have a decisive impact on vulnerable populations now suffering the disease, raising up their health and wellbeing and promoting social and economic advancement.

To achieve these outcomes, a number of tools outlined in WHO's Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016-2030 are of critical function.

Key among them is deepening community engagement and action at the grassroots. As the World Malaria Report highlights, countries across the South-East Asia Region have benefitted immensely from working directly with affected communities. Whether by disseminating insecticidal nets or carrying out rapid diagnostic testing, grassroots volunteer networks have the ability to catalyze real change where effectively engaged. India's Accredited Social Health Activist programme is a good example of how this can be done, and how countries can reach the unreached and underserved while establishing greater community buy-in.

The embrace of innovation and new technologies is likewise crucial. That means strengthening and expanding support for basic, clinical and implementation research able to enhance understanding of both malaria parasites and the mosquitoes that spread them. It also means investing in new technologies and forms of service delivery that can hasten progress in specific contexts. Though Region-wide uptake of Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT), for example, has had dramatic impact, countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion, where resistance has inhibited ACT's efficacy, must now seek-out and obtain newer, more powerful tools before untreatable parasite strains emerge.

Stronger surveillance and information systems also hold great potential. By building on and fortifying existing surveillance, national malaria programmes will be in a better position to allocate or redirect resources to affected areas, especially in the event of an outbreak. Stronger surveillance will also help gauge the effectiveness of interventions, allowing authorities to modify their approach where appropriate. As part of this push, better information on the abundance and behavior of mosquitoes is needed to support mosquito control measures, including the spraying of insecticides, the use of insecticidal nets and behavioral change communications.

Importantly, given that malaria's burden transcends national borders, and can be reintroduced where it has already been eliminated, Region-wide cross-border collaboration is essential. To this end, WHO's data-sharing platform in the Greater Mekong Subregion is a great example of how countries can pool information to pursue common goals and empower national malaria programmes. A similar model should be considered for the entire Region, allowing authorities in each country to access robust and up-to-date data that can help guide their efforts. To make this happen, political obstacles must be overcome in all countries, and transparency pursued as a matter of principle.

Recent momentum in each of these areas is encouraging. In November, a ministerial roundtable was held in New Delhi where, among other things, Member countries focused on operationalizing the South-East Asia Region's 2017-2030 malaria elimination action plan. To follow that up, in early December the Region's health ministers convened once again, this time in Myanmar's capital, Naypyidaw, to share experiences and learn from one another in an effort to accelerate progress at the local, national and regional levels.

This momentum is exactly what is needed for the South-East Asia Region to stay on course and achieve its 2020 and 2030 targets. For the Region's three high-burden Member countries, as well as those that have eliminated or are on the cusp of eliminating the disease, the need to retain focus and deepen the implementation of key tools and strategies cannot be overemphasized. Across the Region, we can accelerate progress and help secure the health and wellbeing of vulnerable populations. Malaria: We can – and must – eliminate it.

Information Provided By: Miguel da Silva (WHO Communication Assistant)

From the "TRIVIA BOOK"

Canadian actor Charles Coghlan died in 1889 in Galveston, USA, around 5,600km (3,480 miles) from his home on Prince Edward Island. He was buried in a lead coffin which was placed in a granite vault. In 1990, a hurricane hit Galveston. The vault where Coghlan was buried was flooded and his coffin floated out into the Bay of Mexico and then out into the Atlantic Ocean. The Gulf stream carried it along for eight years until October 1908 when it was spotted by a local fisherman on Prince Edward Island. Coghlan's body had returned home nine years after his death.

From the "TRIVIA BOOK"

Boredom can lead to madness in parrots. When caged by themselves and neglected for long periods of time, these intelligent, sociable birds can easily become mentally ill. Many inflict wounds upon themselves, develop strange tics, and rip out their own feathers. The birds need constant interaction, affection, and mental stimulation; some bird authorities have determined that some parrot breeds have the mental abilities of a five-year-old human child. Should a neglected parrot go mad, there is little that can be done to restore it to normality.

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ABOUT TIGER:

Tiger Beer was born in 1932 on the streets of Singapore. A stone's throw away from the equator, its unique tropical lagering technique meant it was able to brew a beer that would keep Asia cool. In 2015, it started using the rays of the tropical sun for brewing, with over 8,000 solar panels installed on the rooftop of its facility in Singapore. Now, every Tiger Beer consumed in Singapore is brewed by the sun. 2017 has also saw Tiger Beer take Air-Ink™, the world's first ink created from air pollution, to the streets of the world through creative collaborations between its inventor and the best emerging international artists. Tiger Beer is the number one premium beer in Asia, and the world's fastest growing premium beer, available in more than 50 markets across the globe. For more information, please visit www.tigerbeer.com.



FEATURE - STORIES

Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong-un to meet 'as soon as possible'



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has invited Donald Trump to meet him, an invitation the US leader has said he will accept. The shock announcement was made by senior South Korean officials in Washington, who passed on a letter from the North Korean leader. They said Mr Kim had also agreed to halt nuclear and missile tests and was "committed to denuclearisation". It appears to be a major breakthrough after months of threats and violence. The South Korean delegation had held unprecedented talks with Mr Kim

in Pyongyang earlier this week, part of a diplomatic thaw following the Winter Olympics in South Korea, then travelled to the US to pass on their message. Mr Trump, who has previously said there is no point in talking to North Korea, said the development was "great progress". But he said sanctions will remain in place until a firm agreement is reached. **'Refrain from nuclear tests'** South Korean National security adviser Chung Eui-yong, speaking outside the White House after meeting Mr Trump, credited the US president's "maximum pressure policy together" along with international solidarity for reaching this point. "I told President Trump that at our meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said he's committed to denuclearisation," Mr Chung told a news conference. "Kim pledged that North Korea will refrain from any further nuclear or missile tests." He added: "President Trump appreciated the briefing, and said he would meet Kim Jong-un by May to achieve permanent denuclearisation." North Korea has been isolated on the international stage for decades because of its well-documented human rights abuses and its pursuit of nuclear weapons, in defiance of international laws. No sitting US president has ever sat down for talks with a North Korean leader, so such a meeting would be diplomatically seismic. But the BBC's Laura Bicker in Seoul says it is important to note that North Korea has not yet said it will abandon its nuclear weapons, just that it is committed to doing so. Kim Jong-un has scored a propaganda win, she adds, but Mr Trump will also feel like a winner, with his fiery policies credited for bringing the parties to the table. He has repeatedly belittled Kim Jong-un, and last year threatened him with "fire and fury the likes of which the world has never seen before" if he continued to threaten the US. It also remains unclear exactly what North Korea is asking for in return for these talks, says our correspondent. **BBC**