

Greater resources and stronger political commitment critical in tackling Malaria: WHO



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bobbyramakant 25 April 2008 10448 views

Malaria, a disease without borders, is preventable and treatable however it needs a bolder commitment from donors and member states if it is to be brought under control.

Malaria remains a major health problem in the South-East Asia region with 83% of its population at risks. There are an estimated 20 million cases and 100,000 deaths each year from malaria in the region.

"Today we have powerful new tools and effective models of control,

which is critical in our approach in tackling this disease. But financial resources need to be mobilised and political commitment to addressing this disease needs to be solidified. A lackadaisical attitude to this health issue will not lessen the current disease burden," said Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, WHO Regional Director for South East Asia marking the first World Malaria Day.

Populations particularly susceptible to malaria include those who live in urban slums, the poor, ethnic groups, mobile populations, young adults and border communities. In South-East Asia, where some of the most devastating resurgences of malaria have occurred, the disease continues to pose a serious threat to public health. Much of the malaria in this Region is transmitted by forest-dwelling vectors, making vector control extremely difficult and also leaving large infected populations beyond the reach of basic health infrastructure.

Malaria is endemic in all the countries in the South-East Asia Region except the Maldives, and the situation is becoming increasingly difficult to control. This region also harbours two main malaria parasites, the deadly *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax*, which is notorious for causing relapsing episodes. In addition to damage to health and well being, malaria adversely affects economic development particularly the livelihood of the poor. "A community with malaria is an impoverished community," stressed Dr Plianbangchang.

Parasite strains resistant to chloroquine, (cheapest and most common anti-malaria drug), have spread throughout this region. Multidrug-resistant strains are present in several countries and the resistance level is growing, posing a threat to all means of effective case management. Intensified efforts by Member countries, international agencies, partners and donor agencies are urgently required.

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