



25 April 2018, Cairo - On World Malaria Day 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners are calling on all concerned parties to be ready to end malaria - a disease which can be fatal and which affects millions of people, claiming many lives annually.

This year's World Malaria Day coincides with activities to commemorate the 70th anniversary of WHO. Over the last 7 decades, WHO has been providing support to countries to fight malaria. "Ready to beat malaria" is the theme of this year's day. The theme underscores the collective energy and commitment of the global malaria community in uniting around the common goal of achieving a malaria free world.

Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes. It is a preventable and curable disease and yet the global burden of this disease is very high. According to the latest "World Malaria Report", released in November 2017, there were 216 million cases of malaria in 2016, up from 211 million cases in 2015. The estimated number of malaria deaths stood at 445 000 in 2016, a similar number to the previous year (446 000).

In areas with high transmission of malaria, children under 5 are particularly susceptible to infection, illness and death; more than two thirds (70%) of all malaria deaths occur in this age group. The number of under-5 malaria deaths has declined from 440 000 in 2010 to 285 000 in 2016. However, malaria remains a major killer of children under 5, taking the life of a child every 2 minutes.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, the number of malaria cases increased from 3.9 million in 2015 to 4.3 million in 2016 with 8200 deaths.

Ninety-five percent (95%) of confirmed malaria cases are reported from 4 countries in the Region and 6 countries are at high risk of malaria but are at the stage of burden reduction.

On the occasion of World Malaria Day 2018, Dr Jaouad Mahjour, acting WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said that, “Although coverage of main interventions in endemic countries is increasing it falls short of universal health coverage targets. Humanitarian emergencies taking place in some countries are decreasing the capacity of malaria programmes and insufficient resources in high-burden countries are among the main challenges.”

Over the past few years, the Region has made some achievements towards eliminating malaria. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia are at the stage of malaria elimination.

Fourteen countries in the Region are free from indigenous malaria transmission and are at the stage of prevention of establishment of local malaria transmission.

Increasing insecticide resistance in many malaria-endemic countries of the Region is a threat for vector control as the main preventive measure for malaria.

Together with diagnosis and treatment, WHO recommends a package of proven prevention approaches, including insecticide treated nets, spraying indoor walls with insecticides, and

preventive medicines for the most vulnerable groups: pregnant women, under 5s and infants.

Without urgent action, the major gains in the fight against malaria are under threat. On this World Malaria Day, WHO continues to call for greater investment from national resources and also donors from the Region and expanded coverage of proven tools to prevent, diagnose and treat malaria.

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