

Baghdad, Iraq, April 7, 2014 – With the slogan “Small bite, big threat”, The World Health Organization (WHO) celebrates World Health Day on 7 April 2014 focusing on the serious threat of vector-borne diseases and emphasizing the importance of vector control and availability of safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

The theme of the World Health Day 2014 "Preventing vector-borne diseases" is designed to scale up awareness on the risk impacted by vector-borne diseases and to encourage the world's population to protect themselves against the threat of vectors that cause disease.

“The poorest population is most at risk of vector-borne disease due to lack of safe drinking-water and sanitation, improper housing, and malnutrition. These factors weaken this population immunity,” said Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain, WHO Representative for Iraq. He added: “Over 15% of the global burden of infectious diseases is vector-borne diseases; malaria alone caused the death of 660 000 people in 2010.”

WHO reports indicate that more than half the world's population is under the threat of diseases like malaria, dengue, leishmaniasis, Lyme disease, schistosomiasis, and yellow fever carried by mosquitoes, flies, ticks, water snails and other vectors. Yet the organization emphasizes that these diseases are entirely preventable.

Vector-borne diseases merit global attention; the public health community faces serious challenges in tackling these diseases and outlining what governments, local authorities, community groups, the private sector and individuals can do to prevent disease.

“A global health agenda that gives higher priority to vector control could save many lives and avert much suffering. Simple, cost-effective interventions like insecticide-treated bed nets and indoor spraying have already saved millions of lives,” says Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. “No one in the 21st century should die from the bite of a mosquito, a sand fly, a blackfly or a tick.” She added.

Dr Alaa Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, outlined some of the challenges pertaining to the prevention of vector-borne diseases saying: “There are things

people can do to protect themselves. Keep the environment clean. Use personal protection, such as insect repellent. Sleep under bed nets, cover water containers, and get rid of stagnant water from places where mosquitoes breed, such as unused containers, flower pots, old tyres, broken glass and roof gutters,”

The World Health Day on 7 April every year marks the foundation anniversary of the World Health Organization in 1948. A priority area of public health concern is selected each year to diagnose lifesaving problems and urge governments and decision-makers to address them in a systematic way.

[Arabic press release](#)

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