

INDIA RECORDS LARGEST REDUCTIONS IN MALARIA CASES IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA, SAYS WHO

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

A North Delhi MCD worker fumigating Flag Staff Road area as part of preventive measures against mosquito-borne diseases like Dengue, Malaria and Chikungunya. File Photo | Photo Credit: [SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR](#)

India made impressive gains in the global fight against malaria, recording the largest reduction in cases in South-East Asia from 20 million in 2000 to about 5.6 million last year, according to the World Health Organisation.

The World Malaria Report 2020, released on Monday, said that in 2019, malaria cases globally numbered about 229 million, an annual estimate that has remained virtually unchanged over the last four years.

Last year, the disease claimed about 4,09,000 lives, compared to 4,11,000 in 2018.

“Countries in South-East Asia made particularly strong progress, with reductions in cases and deaths of 73% and 74%, respectively. India contributed to the largest drop in cases region-wide — from approximately 20 million to about 6 million,” WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in the report’s forward.

The report said that the WHO South-East Asia Region accounted for about 3% of the burden of malaria cases globally.

Malaria cases reduced by 73% in the region, from 23 million in 2000 to about 6.3 million in 2019.

The WHO noted the impressive gains made by India in the fight against malaria, with reductions in cases and deaths of 18% and 20%, respectively, over the last two years.

India also recorded a decrease in the number of deaths from malaria between 2000 and 2019.

Malaria deaths in India declined from about 29,500 in 2000 to about 7,700 last year, the report said.

In the WHO South-East Asia Region, malaria deaths reduced by 74 per cent, from about 35,000 in 2000 to 9,000 in 2019.

India, however, still accounted for 88 per cent of malaria cases and 86 per cent of malaria deaths in the WHO South-East Asia Region in 2019.

The WHO is calling on countries and global health partners to step up the fight against malaria, a preventable and treatable disease that continues to claim hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

A better targeting of interventions, new tools and increased funding are needed to change the global trajectory of the disease and reach internationally-agreed targets.

The report noted that the 11 highest burden countries - Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, India, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania - account for 70% of the global estimated case burden and 71% of global estimated deaths from malaria.

According to the WHO report, progress against malaria continues to plateau, particularly in high burden countries in Africa.

Gaps in access to life-saving tools are undermining global efforts to curb the disease, and the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to set back the fight even further.

As in past years, the African Region shouldered more than 90% of the overall disease burden.

Since 2000, the region has reduced its malaria death toll by 44%, from an estimated 6,80,000 to 3,84,000 annually.

However, progress has slowed in recent years, particularly in countries with a high burden of the disease.

A funding shortfall at both the international and domestic levels poses a significant threat to future gains.

In 2019, total funding reached \$3 billion against a global target of \$5.6 billion.

Funding shortages have led to critical gaps in access to proven malaria control tools.

This year, COVID-19 emerged as an additional challenge to the provision of essential health services worldwide.

According to the report, most malaria prevention campaigns were able to move forward this year without major delays.

Ensuring access to malaria prevention — such as insecticide-treated nets and preventive medicines for children — has supported the COVID-19 response strategy by reducing the number of malaria infections and, in turn, easing the strain on health systems.

The WHO worked swiftly to provide countries with guidance to adapt their responses and ensure the safe delivery of malaria services during the pandemic, the report said.

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