

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF on World Malaria Day: Preventable and curable, but still killing 800,000 every year

NEW YORK, 25 April 2011 – Malaria is the third single biggest killer of children globally. An estimated 800,000 people die every year from the disease, with approximately ninety per cent of these deaths occurring in Africa, where malaria accounts for about one in six of all childhood deaths.

"This World Malaria Day – and every day – around 2,000 children will die from a mosquito bite," said Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director. "We have effective measures to combat this deadly disease -- and we must use them to save lives."

Malaria is both preventable and curable. Studies have shown that when a community's children sleep every night under insecticide-treated nets (ITNs), overall child mortality can be reduced by up to 20 per cent.

Yet hundreds of thousands of children, primarily in Africa, will perish because of lack of access to ITNs and to life-saving treatment within 24 hours of onset of symptoms. Waiting even six hours for treatment can mean life or death for a sick child.

Between 2004 and 2010, more than 400 million nets were delivered to malaria-endemic countries, with 290 million delivered since 2008 alone. These 290 million nets are enough to cover approximately 80 per cent of 'country-stated net need' across Africa.

These efforts have led to real progress. Global malaria deaths dropped by 20 per cent between 2000 and 2009 -- statistics that represent many thousands of individual children's lives.

Countries that have systematically scaled up malaria prevention are showing significant reductions in the malaria burden at health facilities. Endemic settings such as Eritrea, Madagascar, São Tomé and Príncipe, Zambia and Zanzibar have shown reductions of more than 50 per cent in either confirmed malaria cases or malaria admissions and deaths.

Fighting malaria not only saves children's lives, but also yields many other health and economic benefits. For example, eliminating malaria eases the burden on over-stretched health centers. Reducing malaria improves the health of pregnant mothers and therefore the health of their babies. Controlling malaria can also reduce deaths due to malnutrition, as those already weakened are more likely to die if they contract the disease.

"We cannot leave some children exposed to malaria and other children safe," said Lake. "Whether it is insecticide-treated nets, proper diagnosis, or effective treatment, the challenge is to provide protection and care to every single child who is at risk."

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

For more information please contact:

Janine Kandel, UNICEF Media, New York, Tel + 1 212 326 7684, jkandel@unicef.org

Christian Moen, UNICEF Media, New York, Tel + 212 326 7516, cmoen@unicef.org