World Malaria Day 2018
Message from WHO Representative to India

Observed on 25 April each year, the World Malaria Day is a global commemoration to sustain commitments to eliminate malaria.

This year, World Malaria Day follows the renewed global commitment to the larger public health goal of ensuring universal health coverage (UHC), the theme of World Health Day 2018. The day presents an opportunity to synergise efforts to ensure UHC by mobilising resources and action to beat malaria by covering the last mile to the most vulnerable people across the world.

Ready to beat malaria
This year's World Malaria Day theme – ready to beat malaria – underscores the collective energy and commitment of the global malaria community in uniting around the common goal of a world free of malaria. The day also coincides with the start of a year-long series of activities to commemorate the 70th anniversary of World Health Organization (WHO).

Global scenario
Malaria remains both, a major cause and a consequence of global poverty: its burden is greatest among the poorest and the most vulnerable members of the society. In 2016, 216 million people around the world had malaria – 5 million more than the year before. Almost half of world's population is at risk of malaria. Of the 91 countries reporting indigenous malaria cases in 2016, 15 countries – all in sub-Saharan Africa, except India – carried 80% of the global burden.

Malaria is preventable and curable, and increased efforts are reducing the malaria burden in many places. In May 2015, the World Health Assembly endorsed the Global Technical Strategy for Malaria Elimination 2016-2030, which lays down clear global goals, milestones and targets till 2030.

Country situation
India has the 3rd highest burden of malaria. In the WHO South-East Asia Region, about 89% of estimated malaria cases are from India.

The malaria map is shrinking fast and the disease is now confined mainly to Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and North-Eastern states. In Odisha, considered India’s highest malaria endemic state, cases have declined by nearly 50% between 2016 and 2017 from July through December. Similar progress has been reported from the North-Eastern states, where the number of malaria cases fell from about 165,000 in 2016 to fewer than 37,000 in 2017. Of the 36 states and union territories, six states contribute 73% of reported cases and 90% of Plasmodium falciparum malaria.

India’s commitment to malaria elimination
The National Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme (NVBDCP) aims to eliminate malaria by 2027 and initiate the process for WHO certification of malaria elimination by 2030. This is in line with the WHO global malaria elimination target.

WHO has assisted the government in the development of the new National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (NSPME) 2017-2022. It was released by Mr J. P. Nadda, Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare in July 2017.
The NSPME informs intervention packages tailored to different transmission settings at sub-district and district levels to make more than 80% of districts of the country malaria-free by 2022. This requires reliable case-detection through a robust surveillance system.

**Universal access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment**

“Through strong political commitment, integrated strategies aimed at reaching the unreached, and a willingness to harness the power of cutting-edge tools, malaria’s centuries-long burden can be lifted. The principle of prevention is key,” says Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia.

Sustained investments are required to enhance and optimise case management through testing, treating and tracking malaria cases. This endeavor must ensure early and rapid diagnostic tests in conjunction with treatment services that are universally available and accessible. The scaling-up of prevention and control measures and increased access to long lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) are also yielding positive results. Across India, over 40 million LLINs are being handed out to protect the at-risk population.

**Consolidating the gains**

India’s is accelerating progress towards malaria elimination and attainment of malaria free status. However, an accurate estimate of the malaria burden is a challenge. Real-time reporting from remote and inaccessible areas and from the private sector will prove critical.

Improved surveillance to optimise the implementation of malaria interventions; filling the backlog of vacancies of multipurpose workers to strengthen the surveillance in the field; and new tools for insecticide resistance management are the need of the hour.

Finally, innovation in tools and implementation approaches will enable the country to accelerate on the path to elimination.

**WHO is committed**

WHO is committed to supporting India under different strategies of 10+1 initiatives. India is the only country, outside Africa, being provided special focus for accelerating malaria burden reduction and building capacities across various aspects of the malaria elimination strategy. This includes support to 15 low-endemic states in Category 1, where surveillance needs to be strengthened to achieve the goal of malaria elimination in 2020.

**Time to act**

From new life-saving treatments to political commitment, we must act now and further accelerate the pace of work to stop malaria in its tracks. The World Malaria Day provides a platform to the government and stakeholders across the country to unite in the battle against the disease and recommit to sustained investment and intensified efforts.

This World Malaria Day, we must all rededicate ourselves to end malaria — in our homes and communities, our countries and around the world. Join us in this fight to beat malaria.

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WHO Representative to India