

Make this world malaria free



Progress has been made in combating malaria, particularly in Africa where the disease is most prevalent, but more must be done to address the global scourge, UNICEF said, as it released a new joint report on the eve of World Malaria Day.

We are, for the first time in history, poised to make malaria a rare cause of death and disability," said Ann M. Veneman, UNICEF Executive Director. "The report shows that endemic African countries received enough nets during 2004-2008 to cover more than 40 per cent of their at-risk populations."

Data presented in the 'Malaria and Children, Progress in Intervention Coverage' report, a joint effort with the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, show major signs of progress across Africa in the fight against malaria, particularly in the increase in distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs). Since 2004 the number of ITNs produced worldwide has more than tripled—from 30 million to 100 million in 2008.

"However every year, this disease still kills an estimated one million people, most of them children in Africa," said Veneman. "Malaria also affects around 50 million pregnant women annually, contributing to maternal anemia, low birth weight babies and even maternal death."

The theme of this year's World Malaria Day, which is marked on April 25, is "Counting malaria out", and there are now just over 600 days remaining until 31 December 2010, the Secretary-General's deadline for all endemic countries to achieve universal coverage with essential malaria control interventions.

"Scaling-up effective interventions has led to declines in malaria cases and deaths at health facilities in many countries, including Eritrea, Rwanda, Zambia and Madagascar," said Veneman. "This has the added benefit of reducing the burden on over-stretched hospitals and clinics and having less absentees in the workplace and in school."

Malaria control is now a major global development priority and is critical for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa. Increased global awareness about malaria has contributed to a significant rise in available resources over recent years, thanks to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, the US President's Malaria Initiative, the World Bank, and others.

"The report shows financing is now available to purchase enough nets to put Africa well on the way to achieving universal coverage by 2010," said Veneman.