

The Fight to Eradicate Malaria: The Global Health Issue

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DESCRIPTION

Malaria, a mosquito-borne infectious disease caused by the *Plasmodium* parasite, continues to show a significant global health challenge. It affects millions of people each year, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of malaria-related deaths occur. Malaria is still a major threat that requires additional research, funding, and combined efforts to eradicate despite discoveries in prevention and treatment. This article explores the impact of malaria, its causes, symptoms, prevention methods, treatment options, ongoing efforts to combat the disease, and the potential future of a malaria-free world.

Malaria disproportionately affects populations in developing countries, especially children and pregnant women. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there were an estimated 229 million cases of malaria and 409,000 malaria-related deaths in 2019. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for approximately 94% of these cases and deaths. The socio-economic impact is staggering, hindering economic development, reducing productivity, and perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Malaria is primarily transmitted through the bites of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes. The five species of *Plasmodium* that cause malaria in humans are *P. falciparum*, *P. vivax*, *P. ovale*, *P. malariae*, and *P. knowlesi*. The initial symptoms of malaria often resemble those of the flu, including fever, headache, chills, and muscle aches. If left untreated, malaria can progress to severe illness, leading to organ failure and death. Preventing malaria involves a multi-faceted approach. Long-Lasting Insecticidal Nets (LLINs) and Indoor Residual Spraying (IRS) with insecticides help reduce mosquito populations and protect individuals from bites.

Antimalarial drugs, such as prophylaxis for travelers and intermittent preventive treatment for pregnant women, also play a crucial role. Additionally, community education programs promote awareness about preventive measures, early diagnosis, and prompt treatment-seeking behavior.

Prompt diagnosis and effective treatment are essential for combating malaria. Artemisinin-Based Combination Therapies (ACTs) are the standard treatment for uncomplicated malaria

caused by *P. falciparum*, the deadliest species. However, drug resistance is a growing concern, emphasizing the need for ongoing research and the development of new antimalarial drugs and vaccines.

Numerous global initiatives and organizations are dedicated to combating malaria. The WHO's Global Malaria Programme provides technical guidance, sets policies, and coordinates global efforts. The Roll Back Malaria Partnership brings together governments, NGOs, and private sector entities to accelerate progress. The production of new innovations, including vaccines and genetically altered insects, indicates possibility. A significant milestone was reached in 2021 when the WHO recommended the first malaria vaccine, the RTS, S vaccine.

The vision of a malaria-free world is achievable but requires sustained commitment and collaboration. Key strategies include scaling up prevention and treatment interventions, strengthening health systems, improving surveillance, and investing in research and development. The malaria Eradication Research Agenda (malERA) sets the research priorities needed to overcome scientific and operational challenges. However, challenges remain, including limited funding, access to healthcare, and the emergence of drug-resistant strains.

Malaria remains a formidable global health challenge, particularly affecting populations in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite significant progress in prevention and treatment, the disease continues to cause immense suffering and mortality. Advancements like the discovery of vaccinations and biologically modified mosquitoes are the result of the combined efforts of governments, organizations, researchers, and communities.

The vision of a malaria-free world is within reach, but it demands continued commitment, investment, and collaboration. By scaling up prevention measures, improving treatment accessibility, strengthening health systems, and investing in research. Through the efforts, malaria can be eradicated and a healthier future could be built for all individuals. We could eradicate malaria from the world when we all work together to overcome this global health issue.

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