

WHO: Dengue is the fastest spreading viral disease

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The World Health Organization's second report on neglected tropical diseases which was published recently says that, the renewed momentum has shifted the world closer to eliminating many of the conditions that take their greatest toll among the poor. Thanks to the new global strategy, a regular supply of quality-assured, cost-effective medicines and support from global partners.

One of the highlights of the report include the fact that in 2012, dengue ranked as the fastest spreading vector-borne viral disease, with an epidemic potential in the world, registering a 30-fold increase in disease incidence over the past 50 years. The report says that the world needs to change its reactive approach and implement sustainable preventive measures.

Support from those countries endemic for these diseases and partners have helped fast-track actions and initiatives that are now having a measurable impact in affected countries and considerable scaling up of preventive chemotherapy. In 2010 alone, 711 million people received treatment for at least one of the four diseases targeted for preventive chemotherapy which include lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminthiasis.

Dr Margaret Chan, director-general of WHO says, "The challenge now is to strengthen capacity of national disease programs in endemic countries and streamline supply chains to get the drugs to the people who need them, when they need them."

Over the next five years, WHO projects that the treatment for schistosomiasis (bilharzia) will reach 235 million people. This will be achieved by increasing availability of medicines (praziquantel) using gifts of medicines and improved distribution at country level.

Key highlights of the report include the fact that eradication of dracunculiasis is in sight. WHO reports a reduction in the number of reported cases of dracunculiasis to 521 cases between January and September 2012 compared with 1006

confirmed cases for the same period in 2011 and of human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) to less than 7000 in 2011 from a high of 30 000 annual cases at the turn of the century.

Also, Rabies has been eliminated in several countries, and WHO anticipates regional elimination of this preventable disease by 2020. A new strategy involving the early detection and use of antibiotics to treat Buruli ulcer has drastically reduced suffering and disability from this chronic and debilitating skin condition. An evaluation of WHO's new strategy, which aims at eradicating yaws by 2020, using a new oral antibiotic treatment designed to replace those developed in the 1950s and which mainly centered on delivering injections of benzathine benzylpenicillin.