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Malaria Deaths Reduced by Half in Amazon Countries

AMI'S cross-border collaboration and consensus-building improves treatment and control

Washington, D.C. – Between 800,000 and 1 million cases of malaria are reported in Latin America each year; the vast majority of these cases occur in the countries that make up the Amazon Basin. Since 2001, the USAID-funded Amazon Malaria Initiative (AMI) has worked to address ineffective malaria treatment and control in eight Amazon countries—Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela.

Recent estimates by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) indicate that, between 2001 and 2007, the number of reported malaria cases has declined by 18 percent and malaria deaths have fallen by 50 percent in Amazon countries. The reduction in malaria-associated illness and deaths suggests that investments in malaria control and prevention in the Amazon Basin—including those made through AMI—are paying off.

As described by Dr. Jaime Chang, from the Health Office of USAID-Peru, AMI's multipronged approach assesses the effectiveness of current drugs, develops new treatment policies, improves drug quality and accessibility, improves diagnostic accuracy, promotes integrated vector control approaches, and devises social media tactics that serve to educate the people of the Amazon Basin regarding prevention measures and access to effective treatments.

“Experience has shown that we can achieve faster results when countries work together,” says Dr. Roberto Montoya of PAHO Brazil. “In a chain reaction, one country increases its malaria control capacity and its neighbors catch on to the new approach or technologies, improving their own capacity.”

AMI—a partnership among USAID, PAHO, United States Pharmacopeia (USP), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Management Sciences for Health (MSH), Research Triangle Institute, and Links Media—has been a key factor in making the Amazon region a top example in fighting the malaria epidemic. This region is the first in the world in which countries have implemented evidence-based policies for malaria treatment, including the adoption of effective artemisinin-based combination therapy to treat the deadliest form of malaria in the region.

–One of the primary contributions of AMI has been identifying malaria parasites’ resistance to drugs through a regional surveillance network,” says Dr. José Pablo Escobar de Pasco, PAHO’s representative in Colombia. –The initiative also has helped align the countries toward the best way to treat malaria by changing treatment policy.”

Continued support for in-country and regional systems for the surveillance and prevention of antimalarial resistance is a major focus for AMI now because new studies suggest that the malaria-causing parasites are developing resistance to the newest antimalarial drug, artemisinin, and the need to carry out such surveillance in a context in which malaria is less frequent than before.

By improving the availability of high-quality medications and systems to ensure that patients receive effective treatment in a timely manner, AMI has contributed to shorter, less severe illness, fewer malaria cases, and, most importantly, lives saved.

All of the partners involved with AMI will convene at an annual meeting to be held in Bogota, Colombia, from March 17 to 19 to review and assess advances made and to discuss future activities, current innovative treatments, and newly attained successes.

For more information on AMI, please visit www.usaidami.org. For more information on USAID, please visit www.usaid.gov. Other participating organizations can be found at www.msh.org, www.usp.org, www.paho.org, and www.cdc.gov. Links Media can be found at www.linksmedia.net.

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