

WHO says COVID disruption has drastic effect on malaria deaths



Geneva, December 7 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) has said the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen malaria cases soar by 14 million year-on-year and the disease's 2020 death toll jump to 627,000, setting back the fight to eliminate malaria.

The UN health agency's annual World Malaria Report, which tracks control and elimination of the disease globally, found that the fight against the Covid pandemic was to the detriment of malaria prevention, diagnosis and treatment, as health officials were forced to divert their attention to the novel coronavirus.

According to WHO statistics, 2020 saw 241 million cases of malaria worldwide, an increase of 14 million from the previous year. Similarly, the rise in fatalities from malaria to 627,000 in 2020 (up 69,000 from 2019) was linked to the impact of the pandemic, with WHO saying some two-thirds of the additional deaths were tied to the disruption caused by Covid.

The number of new yearly infections of malaria had fallen in the past few years, from 251 million in 2010 to 229 million in 2019. However, the latest report highlights how the pandemic hampered international efforts to eradicate the disease.

“In 2020, Covid-19 emerged as an added and formidable challenge to malaria responses worldwide,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. He added that many countries were forced to adapt “the way they deliver [mosquito] nets, diagnostics and medicines to ensure the safety of frontline health workers and communities.”

The WHO’s African Region was worst-hit by the malaria situation, as it accounted for 95% of cases and 96% of deaths. An estimated 80% of all malaria deaths in the region occurred in children under five.

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