

MEDIA RELEASE



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Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Meeting Held in Sabah Malaysia

The third annual meeting of the Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network (APMEN III) was held from May 9-12 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. The meeting celebrated the on-going efforts within the region to reduce the scourge of malaria, to share experiences on how countries are working towards elimination of malaria, and work collaboratively on projects in research, capacity building, and advocacy. In attendance was the Malaysian Deputy Minister of Health, Datuk Rosnah binti Abd. Rashid Shirlin, and Health Director General, Dato' Dr Hasan bin Abdul Rahman, alongside 80 representatives from the 11 Country Partners and research and partner institutions from the region, including the WHO. Bhutan, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vanuatu were represented as partner countries and Vietnam, Cambodia and Nepal attended as meeting observers.

The meeting took place in the state of Sabah on the island of Borneo, where impressive progress is being made towards elimination. Malaysia has one of the world's oldest malaria control programmes, dating back to the pioneering work in Klang, Kuala Lumpur and Penang by Sir Malcolm Watson in 1901. In 1967 the nationwide eradication programme was almost successful in eliminating malaria from the country but transmission persisted in areas of deep forest in Sabah and Sarawak.

In 1986, with the establishment of the Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme, a further reduction was seen in the number of malaria cases. The country has shown its continuing commitment to controlling the disease with the introduction of the Malaria Elimination Programme in the 9th Malaysia Development Plan (2006-2010). With the addition of more resources the aim is now to achieve malaria elimination status by 2020. The strategy includes the use of indoor spraying of residual insecticide and encouraging the use of insecticide-treated bed nets that offer protection for up to 5 years to reduce the *anopheline* mosquitoes spreading malaria and finding cases of malaria early by engaging communities at risk through volunteer village health workers supported by the state health services.

During the APMEN III meeting, participants discussed updates on progress towards elimination of malaria. Two technical topics were explored in depth: *Plasmodium vivax*, the malaria species that is resilient to elimination efforts due to a dormant liver stage, and *Plasmodium knowlesi*, a species that is naturally hosted in a type of monkey, macaques, and was recently found to infect humans in Malaysia. Delegates heard from public health officials from Brunei, which was certified malaria-free in 1987, who stressed the need for continued commitment to surveillance against malaria in order to prevent re-introduction and outbreaks of the disease. The APMEN Fellowship and Research Grant programs were showcased. They are initiatives that enable malaria control staff to gain elimination-specific skills from other APMEN institutions and support operational research for APMEN countries

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through small grants. A workshop was also held on how to type the malaria parasites using genotypes. In response for the need for improved mapping of cases APMEN formed a new group to help with surveillance and the use of geographical information systems. The meeting was hailed a success by participants.

Further information regarding APMEN can be viewed at www.apmen.org.

About the Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network

The Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network (APMEN) was established in 2009 to bring attention and support to the under-appreciated and little-known work of malaria elimination in Asia Pacific, with a particular focus on *Plasmodium vivax*.

APMEN is composed of 11 Asia Pacific countries (Bhutan, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vanuatu) that are pursuing malaria elimination, as well as leaders and experts from key multilateral and academic agencies. The mission of this diverse but cohesive Network is to collaboratively address the unique challenges of malaria elimination in the region through leadership, advocacy, capacity building, knowledge exchange, and building the evidence base.

Development of the Network took place in 2008 through the leadership of the UCSF Global Health Group (GHG) and the School of Population Health, University of Queensland (SPH/UQ). APMEN collaborates closely with the WHO and is supported by the Australian Government through its international aid agency AusAID with a commitment of nearly \$7 million for ongoing support to the Network. This complements Australia's overall support for malaria control and elimination in the Asia Pacific and globally.

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