



Malaria Elimination in Asia Pacific Amidst COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has undermined Asia Pacific's progress and malaria elimination efforts. But it has also underscored the importance of resilience and collaboration.

Impact of COVID-19 in Asia Pacific

Over the past decade, the Asia Pacific region has collectively more than halved the number of malaria cases and made positive gains towards elimination. Then in 2020, COVID-19 swept across the region. Health systems had to bear the dual burden of combating malaria whilst managing COVID-19, threatening the progress of malaria elimination in the region. Challenges include:



Disruptions to malaria surveillance and response activities



Disruptions to distribution of life-saving medications and commodities such as long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs)



Diagnostic and treatment delays, as well as fear of accessing treatment due to COVID-19 exposure



How Countries in the Region Demonstrated Resilience and Collaboration

1

Strong Leadership Commitment

Some countries swiftly re-prioritised malaria elimination strategies, including:



MALAYSIA

Issued an Administrative Order with guidelines on the continuation of malaria interventions early on, to maintain its "zero indigenous human malaria" status



INDIA

Persistent commitment at the national and sub-national levels to ensure the continuity of malaria elimination projects



LAO PDR

Demonstrated sustained commitment to acceleration plans, rolling out new malaria elimination strategies and efforts



2

Timely Adaptation of Malaria Interventions

Some countries adapted strategies and implemented innovative approaches to malaria service delivery, through the support of community health workers, including:



CAMBODIA

Conducted video training for its village health workers on COVID-19 and malaria diagnosis protocols. Also appointed a dedicated COVID-19 and malaria task force to ensure continuity of malaria interventions



PAKISTAN

Swiftly adapted its distribution and training strategies for malaria, adopting a whole-of-society approach to implement LLIN distribution campaigns and prevent outbreaks in high-burden tribal districts



SOLOMON ISLANDS

Leveraged community networks to ensure household delivery of LLINs continued

3

Successful Integration of COVID-19 and Malaria Responses

Some countries leveraged overlaps in COVID-19 and malaria responses, optimizing the limited resources available, including:



SRI LANKA

Instigated efforts to prevent reintroduction of malaria post-elimination, strong cross-ministry coordination to integrate COVID-19 quarantine procedures for international arrivals, as well as surveillance efforts to avoid imported malaria cases



BHUTAN

Community Action Groups, originally designed to carry out social mobilization activities among communities in border and remote areas, revitalized and trained alongside additional community champions and village health workers to ensure service delivery for both COVID-19 and malaria



INDONESIA

Health officials in several high burden provinces mobilized sub-national budgets and integrated COVID-19 and malaria screening and testing procedure

Priorities for Malaria Elimination Moving Forward

While the examples of leadership, adaptation and integration across the region demonstrate remarkable resilience, they also highlight ongoing gaps in many countries where aspects of these key elements are still lacking.

As the region continues to respond to COVID-19 and prepare for future health emergencies, it is critical for each country to:

1

Maintain strong leadership at the international, national and sub-national level to ensure resilient malaria elimination programme rollouts

2

Strengthen agility on the ground for effective adaptation of malaria elimination strategies

3

Enhance multisectoral coordination and integration of disease surveillance responses to keep malaria on national radars

Maintain continued resilience, commitment and collaboration we can maintain momentum against malaria to ensure lives are saved and progress is not lost – and importantly, stay on track for malaria elimination by

2030



For more details, please go to the full report **Malaria Elimination Amidst COVID-19: A Test of Resilience in Asia Pacific**