

Meeting Report

WORKSHOP ON WHO POLICY GUIDANCE ON MALARIA ELIMINATION AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTENSIFICATION PLANS FOR REDUCING MALARIA BURDEN IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION



22–23 November 2021
Virtual meeting

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

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MEETING REPORT

WORKSHOP ON WHO POLICY GUIDANCE ON MALARIA ELIMINATION
AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTENSIFICATION PLANS
FOR REDUCING MALARIA BURDEN IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION

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NOTE

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants of the Workshop on WHO Policy Guidance on Malaria Elimination and the Implementation of the Intensification Plans for Reducing Malaria Burden in the Greater Mekong Subregion and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the conveners.

This report has been prepared by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific for Member States in the Region and for those who participated in the virtual Workshop on WHO Policy Guidance on Malaria Elimination and the Implementation of the Intensification Plans for Reducing Malaria Burden in the Greater Mekong Subregion from 22 to 23 November 2021.

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KEYWORDS

Malaria – Epidemiology, Prevention and control / Mekong valley

ABBREVIATIONS

DVBD	Division for Vector Borne Diseases (Thailand)
G6PD	glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
IPTf	intermittent preventive treatment for forest goers
LLIHN	long-lasting insecticidal hammock net
LLIN	long-lasting insecticidal net
MEAT	Malaria Elimination Audit Tool
MME	Mekong Malaria Elimination
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PPE	personal protective equipment
TDA	targeted drug administration
WHO	World Health Organization

SUMMARY

The Workshop on the World Health Organization (WHO) Policy Guidance on Malaria Elimination and the Implementation of the Intensification Plans for Reducing Malaria Burden in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) was convened virtually from 22 to 23 November 2021. Organized by the Mekong Malaria Elimination (MME) programme, it brought together participants from the six GMS countries – Cambodia, China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam – and the Global Malaria Programme (GMP), as well as technical experts and partners to help GMS countries with the task of eliminating malaria and prepare them for the process of verification and certification of malaria elimination (WHO certification of national malaria elimination).

The main discussion points included the recent updates of the *WHO Malaria Elimination Guidelines* and related tools, programming methods for low-burden or malaria-free settings, and the lessons from the implementation of focalized innovative approaches to accelerate malaria elimination efforts in the GMS. The key points of the meeting included:

- **Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016-2030:** The Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly adopted the *Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030* in May 2015. It provides a comprehensive framework to guide countries in their efforts to accelerate progress towards malaria elimination. The updated version, endorsed by the World Health Assembly in May 2021, reflects lessons from the global malaria response over the last five years. While the milestones and targets remain the same, the approaches to tackling the disease, in some areas, have evolved to keep pace with the changing malaria landscape. The updated principles emphasize the centrality of country ownership and leadership in accelerating malaria elimination.
- **RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine:** More than 2.4 million doses of the malaria vaccine were administered by October 2021. The vaccine has reached areas that were not covered by bed nets. The pilot has shown that adding a malaria vaccine to current interventions can increase access and reduce gaps in malaria prevention.
- **WHO malaria guidelines:** The first consolidated version of the *WHO Guidelines for Malaria* was published in an online application, MagicApp, in February 2021; the first online update occurred in July 2021. The living guidelines facilitate the incorporation of new evidence and research findings as they become available. The Global Malaria Programme established guideline development groups for five key areas: vector control, elimination, chemoprevention, treatment and diagnosis. Updated recommendations from these groups will be published in MagicApp in 2022. There is also a joint guidelines development process ongoing in consultation with immunization colleagues to develop concrete recommendations on malaria vaccines.
- **Malaria surveillance assessment toolkit:** WHO and partners have developed a malaria surveillance assessment toolkit. It allows countries to identify key actionable gaps in malaria surveillance across any endemic setting. WHO is currently looking for countries willing to pilot either rapid assessments of their malaria surveillance systems or assessments in elimination settings.
- **Country updates:** Cambodia, Myanmar, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam outlined their progress according to the recommendations from the 2020 meeting. Surveillance continues to be integrated as a core intervention in all countries. Thailand completed a Malaria Elimination Assessment Tool (MEAT) exercise in 2021 and received recommendations from the Malaria Elimination Oversight Committee. Viet Nam intends to complete a second MEAT exercise with WHO in the coming months.
- **Focalized innovative approaches:** Focalized innovative approaches, including vector control, active fever screening, targeted drug administration (TDA) and intermittent preventive treatment for forest goers (IPTf), are being implemented in Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Lessons from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic pilot indicated the need to change antimalarial drugs to reduce the impact of side-effects in the target population. Cambodia’s *Assessment of Foci Management* highlighted the need to maintain activities by regularly

strengthening community engagement and supervision from local and central authorities. The Mekong Malaria Elimination programme encouraged both to conduct annual impact analyses on the focalized innovative approaches.

- **High burden to high impact approach:** Malaria is geographically heterogeneous, with transmission intensity and burden varying subnationally, even in high-burden countries. Stratification allows national malaria programmes to design focused, tailored responses by assigning specific intervention packages and deploying strategies to designated strata. This process uses local data to determine the appropriate mix of interventions, for a given area for optimum impact on transmission and disease burden.
- ***Plasmodium vivax* elimination:** Anti-relapse treatment is an integral part of the complete management of *P. vivax* malaria. National malaria programmes should explore all efforts and avenues to safely administer primaquine to patients. The glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) status of patients should be used to guide the dosing schedule and health-care support system to safely administer primaquine and prevent relapse.
- **Maintaining microscopic capacity in the Americas:** The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with microscopists at the regional, national and local levels to sustain the quality of microscopy among the countries of the Americas. This standardizes microscopic malaria diagnosis processes and protocols across the Americas and ensures the availability of skilled lab technicians.
- **China's malaria-free certification:** China's recent experience highlights that high-level political commitment and effective multisectoral collaboration are integral to facilitating the process of malaria-free certification. Once countries or areas have eliminated malaria, national malaria programmes must pivot to preventing re-establishment by integrating malaria activities in general health services.
- **Developing prevention of re-establishment guidelines in Thailand:** Thailand has developed a subnational prevention of re-establishment plan which supports the country's preparedness for malaria-free certification. Subdistrict administrative organizations have taken on more responsibilities to manage health activities, including malaria elimination and prevention of re-establishment. This strategy brings together agencies, offices and partners that contribute to implementing the existing prevention of re-establishment guidelines and ensure that all provinces have sufficient capacity to continue implementing vector control, case/foci responses and preparedness activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Meeting organization

The Workshop on the World Health Organization (WHO) Policy Guidance on Malaria Elimination and the Implementation of the Intensification Plans for Reducing Malaria Burden in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) was convened with the intention of supporting GMS countries with the task of eliminating malaria and preparing them for the process of verification and certification of malaria elimination.

1.2 Meeting objectives

The objectives of the meeting were:

- 1) to align country field actions with the *Framework of Malaria Elimination* and the *Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016-2030*;
- 2) to provide guidance on key principles underlying malaria elimination and their adaptation to local contexts;
- 3) to prepare countries for the process for obtaining malaria-free certification from WHO;
- 4) to assess the *Intensification Plans for Hard to Reach Populations* and provide recommendations to accelerate malaria elimination in the GMS.

2. PROCEEDINGS

2.1 Opening session

Dr Tran Huong, Director, Division of Programmes for Disease Control, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, delivered the welcome address to the workshop participants. She congratulated China for the recent malaria-free certification. She emphasized that the workshop links to WHO's broader efforts to reach the unreached, which is one of four thematic priorities identified in *For the Future: Towards the Healthiest and Safest Region*. This vision for WHO work with Member States and partners in the Western Pacific Region has helped to bring malaria services closer to hard-to-reach populations by aligning activities with their movement patterns and intervention preferences. Following this, Dr Pedro Alonso, Director of the WHO Global Malaria Programme, provided the opening remarks for the workshop. He emphasized that new tools for WHO certification of malaria elimination are already being applied in the GMS. These include the Malaria Elimination Audit Tool, which helps countries assess their readiness for malaria-free certification.

Dr Luciano Tuseo from the Mekong Malaria Elimination (MME) programme provided a briefing of the meeting objectives and epidemiological situation in the GMS. This was followed by the nomination of

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