

Welcome to Western Pacific NTD News!

This newsletter, to be published quarterly by the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, will ensure stakeholders are updated on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) activities and events in the Region. The activities in this issue of the NTD News took place from July 2014 to January 2015.



1. NEWS FROM MEMBER COUNTRIES

Cambodia

- The Ministry of Health continued to implement mass drug administration (MDA) for school aged children, pre-school aged children and women of child bearing age in 2014. MDA was implemented also against schistosomiasis.
- Steps have been initiated to prepare the dossier to document elimination of lymphatic filariasis and submit it to the WHO Regional Office in 2015.

People's Republic of China

- An imported case of sleeping sickness, due to infection with *Trypanosoma brucei gambiense*, was reported from Jiangsu province. The affected person returned from Gabon in West Africa, a known endemic country. The China Center for Disease Control and Prevention conducted investigations of people travelling with the patient. WHO Headquarters and the Regional Office provided technical assistance, medicines and diagnostics to deal with the imported case.

Cook Islands

- The Ministry of Health drafted a National Plan of Action for Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (2014-2020).
- The Ministry of Health initiated steps to develop and submit the dossier to the WHO Regional Office in 2015 to document elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem.

Fiji

- The Ministry of Health and Medical Services established the Soil-transmitted Heminthiasis Control Project in January 2014 with assistance from Seoul National University. Under the project, a laboratory for parasitological investigations was also established in Suva.
- The lymphatic filariasis elimination programme completed 11th round of mass drug administration in the Eastern Division and Taveuni Island in October 2014 and achieved 93% treatment coverage. One more round of MDA will be implemented in 2015.
- A joint transmission assessment survey (TAS) for lymphatic filariasis and survey on soil transmitted helminths was implemented in the Western Division.
- The Central Division and the Northern Division passed TAS 1 in 2014, leading to the decision to stop MDA.

French Polynesia

- A sentinel site survey to assess post-mass drug administration prevalence of lymphatic filariasis was conducted in urban areas in 2014. Results indicated that the urban areas could progress to conducting the first transmission assessment survey.

Kiribati

- By 2014, all implementation units passed the 1st transmission assessment survey. Thus, the lymphatic filariasis elimination programme entered the surveillance phase.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic

The following activities were implemented:

- Mid-term assessment survey for lymphatic filariasis in October 2014.
- Mass drug administration against lymphatic filariasis in January 2015 with effective coverage. One more round is planned in 2016.
- Preventive chemotherapy against schistosomiasis in December 2014.
- Deworming among school aged children and preschool aged children in April and October 2014.
- Stool examination to assess prevalence levels of soil-transmitted helminth infections and schistosomiasis in sentinel sites in October and August 2014, respectively. Preventive chemotherapy against opisthorchiasis in 5 of 6 endemic provinces in 2014.
- Recently, a suspected new endemic focus of lymphatic filariasis was detected in Savannakhet province. District health staff reported presence of four individuals affected with chronic lymphedema of lower limbs in four villages in one district. To verify the total number of cases, a house-to-house rapid questionnaire survey was carried out with technical support from WHO. Depending on the outcome of the survey, further investigations including a mapping survey could be undertaken to determine the endemicity status and necessity of MDA.

The Marshall Islands

- A draft National Action Plan for Neglected Tropical Diseases (2014-2020) has been prepared by the Ministry of Health.
- Steps were initiated to prepare and submit a dossier in 2015 to WHO Regional Office to document elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem.

The Federated States of Micronesia

- The lymphatic filariasis elimination programme commenced mass drug administration in Chuuk State in November 2014 after Chuuk showed persisting transmission, as evident from the national prevalence survey in 2013.

New Caledonia

- The Department of Health conducted a lymphatic filariasis prevalence assessment in 2013. The report suggested that no lymphatic filariasis elimination programme is required in New Caledonia. The report was circulated to the members of the Western Pacific Regional Programme Review Group (RPRG) on Neglected Tropical Diseases for their inputs. On the basis of RPRG members' inputs, literature on lymphatic filariasis epidemiology, and WHO guidelines on lymphatic filariasis elimination criteria, the RPRG concluded that further information on lymphatic filariasis was necessary from Loyalty Islands of New Caledonia. This has been communicated to the Department of Health.

Papua New Guinea

- The Department of Health conducted lymphatic filariasis mass drug administration in New Ireland province with renewed assistance from several stakeholders. Health volunteers distributed drugs and implemented directly observed treatment. The reported and evaluated treatment coverage rates were above 75%.
- A stakeholders meeting and planning workshop on lymphatic filariasis was conducted in July 2014, as a preparatory step to implement and expand MDA in 2015.

Philippines

- Mass drug administration (MDA) and transmission assessment surveys (TAS) in different provinces have been making steady progress.
- Preventive chemotherapy for control of soil-transmitted helminths and elimination of schistosomiasis continued in 2014.
- The Department of Health organized the 3rd Annual Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) Stakeholders Meeting in Davao City in August 2014. The meeting was attended by 170 provincial and municipal officials. The provinces of Palawan and Catanduanes were confirmed by the Department of Health to be free from lymphatic filariasis.
- The Department of Health organized the schistosomiasis Clinical Practice Guidelines Orientation in Ormoc City, Leyte Province, on 21-23 August 2014. Discussions included roll out co-administration of praziquantel and albendazole in large scale in campaigns against schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminths in co-endemic areas.
- The Philippine Schistosomiasis Control and Elimination programme held its annual programme implementation Review in Davao City on 4-7 November 2014. The review was attended by all the regional schistosomiasis coordinators. The treatment coverage under the preventive chemotherapy programme and the results of sentinel school surveillance, focal surveys and national surveys were reviewed and discussed. WHO provided technical assistance and guidance on the way forward in reaching the targets for schistosomiasis control in the Philippines.
- WHO provided technical assistance to the soil-transmitted helminths control programme of Region 11. School based de-worming in Region 11 has been reporting excellent coverage rates of 70 – 95%. Some schools were implementing the combined de-worming, using praziquantel and albendazole against schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminths respectively, and plans were underway to scale up this strategy to all schools in Region 11 by 2015.
- A study undertaken by the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, Philippines, in collaboration with Brown University, United States of America, revealed prevalence of *Schistosoma japonicum* in 97% of water buffaloes in Leyte province, underlying the need for a comprehensive approach that includes animal health to control and eliminate schistosomiasis in the Philippines.

Solomon Islands

- A draft National Action Plan for Neglected Tropical Diseases (2014-2020) has been prepared.
- The first school-based deworming programme was initiated in 2014.
- Mass drug administration (MDA) for trachoma elimination was implemented country-wide. The impact of trachoma MDA on Yaws is being assessed.



The first school deworming campaign in Honiara, Solomon Islands, 2014



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Tonga

- The lymphatic filariasis elimination programme drafted the transmission assessment survey protocol and conducted microplanning in 2014.

Tuvalu

- A draft National Action Plan for Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (2014–2020) has been prepared.
- The mass drug administration (MDA) against lymphatic filariasis was implemented in November 2014. This was the first of the two additional rounds of MDA recommended based on the last prevalence survey in 2013 that showed ongoing transmission.

Vanuatu

- Conducted two rounds of school deworming in 2014.
- Conducted yaws case detection and treatment and their contacts.
- Conducted countrywide health education on yaws.
- Initiated steps to strengthen the lymphatic filariasis morbidity management and disease prevention programme.

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