



AMAZON MALARIA INITIATIVE

MALARIA ELIMINATION Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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What is malaria elimination?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines malaria elimination as the interruption of local mosquito-borne malaria transmission in a defined geographical area, usually a country, as a result of deliberate efforts. Malaria elimination is a continuous process that requires national and community commitment to sustain efforts beyond the achievement of zero cases, in order to prevent reintroduction of the disease.

How is malaria elimination different from malaria eradication?

Elimination refers to the interruption of local malaria transmission in a defined geographical area.¹ Malaria eradication is when malaria has been permanently eliminated on a global level, in other words, once all countries have eliminated the disease.

How is malaria elimination different from malaria control?

Malaria control is on the continuum towards malaria-free status. In the short term, the goal of malaria control is to reduce the disease burden to manageable levels of morbidity and mortality. A country-level malaria control program may have national elimination as its ultimate goal. Elimination seeks to reduce local transmission of the disease to zero cases. Committing to elimination requires a specific set of programmatic interventions, which should be based on the WHO guidelines as well as scientific evidence about what works in the local context.

When does a country receive malaria elimination certification?

A country may request WHO (in the region of the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization) to begin the process to certify malaria elimination after local malaria transmission has been interrupted for at least three consecutive years. At this point, the WHO may grant certification if the country can prove beyond reasonable doubt to an independent certification team designated by WHO that it has met the evaluation prerequisites.

What are some of the WHO prerequisites² that my country must achieve for malaria elimination?

- A good surveillance mechanism with full coverage of all geographical areas;
- Quality-assured laboratory services to diagnose malaria;
- Notification and full, immediate reporting by public and private health services, with epidemiological investigation of every malaria infection (case) and focus;
- Vigilant health services for detection, treatment, and follow-up of all possible malaria cases, supported by continued education on malaria for health workers;
- Services to raise awareness and provide practical advice on malaria prevention for nationals traveling abroad;
- Entomological surveillance in receptive areas;
- Systems for early detection of and rapid response to outbreaks;
- Inter-country information-sharing and coordination mechanisms for malaria control and elimination wherever relevant, due to migration patterns or adjacent malarious areas;
- A comprehensive national plan of action with continued political and financial support to carry out activities needed to prevent reestablishment of transmission.

What are some of the challenges to malaria elimination?

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have had a long history of attempting to eliminate malaria. Ensuring political commitment to provide sustainable resources is an ongoing challenge. Other challenges include parasites that may become less sensitive or resistant to certain antimalarial medicines and vectors (mosquitoes) that may become less sensitive or resistant to control measures. For this reason, efforts to combat malaria must continue to monitor resistance and provide adaptive measures to reduce malaria morbidity and mortality.

Will malaria elimination benefit other health issues?

By meeting the WHO prerequisites (see above), a country may be able to strengthen its capacity to address other health issues, particularly vector-borne diseases such as dengue and chikungunya.

Is it possible that a country may have cases of malaria after elimination has been certified?

Yes, there is a possibility for imported malaria cases when travelers carrying the parasite arrive from other countries where they acquired the infection. This may lead to reintroduction of the disease. For this reason, it is important that countries have strong surveillance systems to test, treat, and track all new cases in order to prevent the disease from being reestablished within a malaria-free area.

Is malaria elimination only a health issue? What other sectors should be involved?

Though malaria elimination is led by the health sector, malaria elimination may have positive consequences for other sectors including agriculture, commerce, tourism, and education. Therefore, these sectors should be actively involved in working to eliminate the disease, help identify resources, and commit to supporting efforts beyond zero cases.

With all the other issues in my community, why should I make malaria elimination a priority and commit resources to this effort?

Malaria has a high social cost, as it is linked to reduced educational achievement, prolonged disability, economic difficulties due to lost productivity, and unnecessary loss of life. However, these costs are avoidable. Investing in malaria control and elimination now can help communities to overcome multiple development issues. In the long run, the cost of inaction may be equal to or higher than the additional resources needed to intensify efforts and eliminate the disease.

Have other diseases been eliminated in Latin America and the Caribbean? If so, which ones?

Yes, rubella, polio, and smallpox have been eliminated in Latin America and the Caribbean. Smallpox remains the only disease to date to have been eradicated, meaning it has been eliminated worldwide. Ongoing efforts exist in the region to eliminate other preventable diseases such as river blindness, tuberculosis, and mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis, which has so far been achieved only in Cuba.

Where can I find more information?

You can learn more about malaria elimination from the Ministry of Health in your country, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO),³ the Malaria Eradication Scientific Alliance (MESA),⁴ and from regional initiatives including the USAID-funded Amazon Malaria Initiative (AMI),⁵ the Elimination of Malaria in Mesoamerica and the Island of Hispaniola (EMMIE) Initiative, and the Malaria Zero Initiative.

1 See WHO definition: <http://www.who.int/malaria/areas/elimination/overview/en/>

2 See WHO prerequisites: <http://www.who.int/wer/2014/wer8929.pdf>

3 PAHO/WHO website: <http://www.paho.org>

4 MESA website: <http://www.malariaeradication.org>

5 AMI website: <http://www.usaidami.org>

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