

Paraguay's elimination of malaria 'shows what is possible' – UN health agency

Paraguay has successfully eliminated malaria, the United Nations health agency has announced, highlighting that the major milestone offers lessons to other countries aiming to control the mosquito-borne sickness.

According to the UN [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), the “[incredible achievement](#)” makes Paraguay the first country in the Americas in almost 45 years to wipe out the disease. Cuba was the last country in the region to eliminate malaria, in 1973.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO, [attributed](#) the success to three key factors, the first of which was Paraguay's focus on tracking the disease and preventing outbreaks, not just treating cases.

“Second, a network of committed health staff and community volunteers ensured no one was left behind in getting universal access to primary health care,” he continued.

Also vital was the “unwavering commitment and leadership” at all levels, to keep malaria control efforts on track, added the head of WHO.

However, in spite of the success in Paraguay and in other countries, malaria remains a major health concern. In 2016, the disease resulted in 216 million cases worldwide and claimed 445,000 lives.

Mr. Tedros urged continued vigilance against the disease, noting that success in Paraguay “shows what is possible.”

“It gives us hope that if malaria can be eliminated in one country, it can be eliminated in all countries.”

The end of malaria in Paraguay

According to WHO, between 1950-2011, Paraguay systematically developed policies and programmes to control and eliminate the disease, a significant public health challenge for a country that reported more than 80,000 cases in the 1940s.

As a result, the South American country recorded its last case of *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria in 1995, and *P. vivax* malaria, in 2011.

In 2011, a five-year plan was launched to consolidate the gains, prevent re-establishment of transmission and prepare for elimination certification, said WHO.

Continued efforts against malaria identified Paraguay in 2016, as one of 21 countries with the potential to eliminate malaria by 2020, and receive support under WHO's E-2020 initiative.

Other countries on the list being supported through the E-2020 initiative, include Belize, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Suriname.

Malaria: Symptoms and prevention

Malaria is a [life-threatening disease](#) caused by parasites (*P. falciparum*, *P. malariae*, *P. ovale* and *P. vivax*) that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected female *Anopheles* mosquitoes.

According to WHO, it takes between 10 and 15 days for symptoms to appear, after being infected.

The first symptoms – fever, headache, and chills – may be mild and difficult to recognize as malaria. If not treated within 24 hours, *P. falciparum* malaria can progress to severe illness, often leading to death.

Vector control is the main way to prevent and reduce malaria transmission.

WHO recommends protection for all people at risk of malaria with effective malaria vector control. Two forms of vector control – insecticide-treated mosquito nets and indoor residual spraying – have proven to be highly effective at preventing transmission.

Antimalarial medicines (chemoprophylaxis; or sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine for pregnant women) can also be used to prevent malaria.