



World Health Organization

Description of Committee

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the authority on international health within the United Nations system. Established April 7, 1948, the WHO is responsible for producing health guidelines, promoting health research, and helping countries address public health issues. Along with its **member states**, the agency works for the "attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health". The organization defines health as not just the absence of physical illness, but also a state of physical, mental, and social well-being.

WHO is governed by the World Health Assembly (WHA). Composed of 193 member states and two associate members, WHA meets at the WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland each year to set policies, programs, and the annual budget for the Organization. The Assembly also elects members of a 34-member Executive Board for three-year terms and a Director-General for a five-year term. The current Director-General is Dr. Margaret Chan of Hong Kong. Additionally, six regional committees focus on health matters of a regional nature.

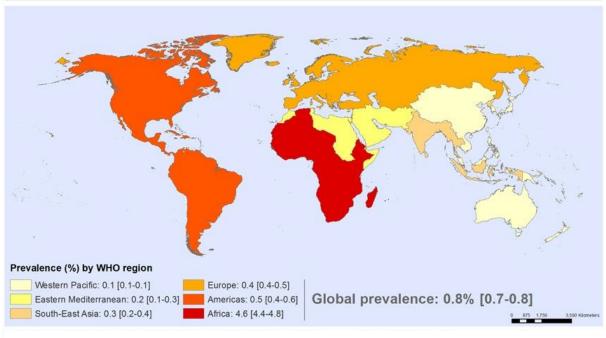
To overcome **global health** concerns, WHO and its member states work with many partners around the world, including other UN agencies, donors, **non-governmental organizations** (**NGOs**), WHO collaborating centers and the private sector. They also employ thousands of public health experts around the world, including doctors, epidemiologists, scientists, managers, administrators, and other professionals.

Topic: HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other Communicable Diseases

HIV/AIDS

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the virus that can lead to Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome, also known as AIDS. Being HIV-positive does not necessarily mean that one has AIDS; a person is diagnosed with AIDS when his or her **CD4** count drops below 200.² Like other viruses, HIV causes flu-like symptoms, something that one's immune system can usually clear out after some time. Unlike other viruses, however, HIV stays with the victim for life. Since its discovery – which was fairly recent as far as life-threatening diseases go – AIDS has been the cause of over 30 million deaths.³





Adult HIV Prevalence (15-49 years) by WHO region, 2011 Source: World Health Organization

The fact that HIV/AIDS is a recent discovery makes for a large base of misinformation about the virus and disease. How one can contract HIV is the subject of many questions. Evidence shows that HIV may only be contracted through blood, semen/vaginal fluid, and a woman's breast milk. HIV cannot be contracted from hugging, kissing, or sharing eating utensils with an HIV-positive individual. It also cannot be contracted from biting or bloodsucking insects such as mosquitoes. Individuals with HIV need to be careful with practicing safe sex, as the virus is slightly different and affects every individual differently.⁴

In many societies, there is **stigma** attached with being HIV-positive or having AIDS. This might be because the virus is often contracted from a form of sexual activity, which can be seen as impure since many societies have stigmas associated with sex. Individuals who contract HIV and/or have AIDS often face social alienation from friends, even family members.⁵

Thankfully, medication to mitigate the virus exists. **Antiretroviral therapy (ART)** maximally suppresses the HIV virus and stops the progression of the disease. The cost-effectiveness of ART is high, but access to the therapy has been an issue for the numerous individuals with HIV in third world countries, especially in countries in **sub-Saharan Africa**.⁶

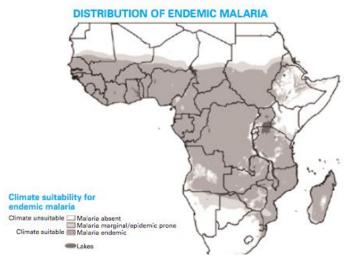
Malaria

Malaria is a blood disease that was the source of 219 million clinical episodes and 660,000 deaths in 2010, most in the sub-Saharan African region. Unlike HIV/AIDS, malaria is animal-borne; individuals contract malaria from mosquitoes. People with malaria experience fever, chills, and other symptoms that are flu-like in nature. If left untreated, individuals with malaria may develop severe complications and die. It is especially harmful to pregnant women, as infection during pregnancy can be fatal to the infant's birth weight and overall wellbeing. Low birth weight is one of the leading contributors of infant mortality rates.



Increasing evidence suggests that where they occur together, malaria and HIV infections interact and can worsen HIV by expediting the progression towards AIDS and increasing viral loads in adults, particularly in pregnant women. Likewise, HIV infections make malaria worse in adults with low CD4 cell counts.⁹

Thankfully, much is known about malaria, and effective tools to prevent and treat the disease exist today. Simply sleeping under an insecticide-treated net may reduce the chance of contracting malaria, and has proven to reduce the



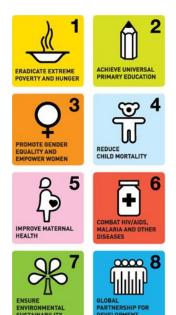
Distribution of Endemic Malaria in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2004.

Source: Roll Back Malaria UNICEF

overall child mortality rate by 20%. ¹⁰ That translates roughly to six children per every thousand. In addition, prompt attention to an infected victim can increase his or her chances of survival and recovery.

Other Communicable Diseases

Many other communicable diseases pose problems around the world, especially in third world countries. Most of these diseases are diarrheal and originate from unprotected water sources, hand-to-mouth contact, and improperly disposed **stool**¹¹. Though **diarrheal diseases** remain a global threat – **cholera** being a common example – they are preventable through basic hygiene and access to clean drinking water.



The Eight MDGs
Source: United Nations MDG

Even in developed countries such as the United States, communicable diseases are a topic of concern. Individuals are always encouraged by health professionals to receive a flu shot every fall to prevent the spread of the seasonal flu. In 2009, the H1N1 virus took the world by storm and was declared a **pandemic**, having caused around 17,000 deaths by the beginning of 2010. After rushed efforts to vaccinate individuals and educate the masses about the H1N1 virus, the H1N1 pandemic was officially declared over by August 2010 – serving as proof that with proper education, support, and a plan of action, communicable diseases are readily preventable.

Millennial Development Goals (MDG)

At the Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 countries adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration, a commitment to a new global partnership to reduce poverty by 2015 through the attainment of eight specific **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).**¹³

The sixth MDG specifically addresses HIV/AIDS and malaria by aiming to reduce and halt the spread of AIDS and malaria by 2015. WHO collaborates with many partners, including **UNDP**, **UNFPA**,



UNICEF, and the **World Bank** on MDG 6. MDG 6 also aimed to attain universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment to anyone who may need it by 2010. While this goal was unfulfilled by 2011, universal access to antiretroviral therapy increased.¹⁴

The progress made with MDG 6 is still not enough to meet MDG goals by 2015. Because of anti-retroviral therapy is now more readily available to individuals, the number of people living with HIV has only continued to increase year to year, though the rate of newly HIV infected individuals continues to decrease. Still, poverty, violence, discrimination perpetuate high numbers of individuals with HIV, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

As far as malaria is concerned, MDG 6 set to reverse the incidence of malaria by 2015. Reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other communicable diseases play a significant role in achieving several other MDGs. The interconnected nature of the MDGs emphasizes the strong impact that reducing rates of malaria and HIV/AIDS can have on poverty eradication.

Beyond 2015: Post-MDG Plans

With the 2015 deadline for fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals nearing, discussions about what will come next are underway. The MDGs have been fairly successful in getting some of the world's poorest countries on track to achieve most goals by 2015. But for other countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, which have struggled with staying on track with meeting goals, a more explicit set list of goals are necessary.

The Secretary-General has established the UN System Task Team on Post-2015 UN Development Agenda. This Task Team has brought together the efforts of more than 60 UN agencies and organizations from around the world. The UN is also looking at the finances and feasibility of goals, new and old, and consulting over 70 countries on a post-2015 development agenda. 15 A set of eleven thematic consultations has been established as talking points, and are as follows:

- 1. Conflict and fragility
- 2. Education
- 3. Environmental Sustainability
- 4. Governance
- 5. Growth and employment
- 6. Health
- 7. Hunger, food, and nutrition



Infographic highlighting the successes and goals of MDG 6, 2011.

Source: United Nations



- 8. Inequalities
- 9. Population dynamics
- 10. Energy
- 11. Water

In addition to consulting member states about what they would like to see established, citizens are also given a voice in the process with the MY World 2015 Survey, making the UN's efforts more transparent than ever. Survey takers have the opportunity to rank which six development issues have the most impact on their lives.

QUESTIONS AND IDEAS TO CONSIDER...

- 1. How is the health system structured in your country? How much money is spent each year on health, and how much of this is devoted to causes relating to HIV/AIDS and malaria?
- 2. Is health care more accessible and/or affordable for some segments of the population?
- **3.** What iniatives does your country presently have to improve the lives of those with HIV/AIDS and malaria?
- **4.** How can you improve the quality of health care that people of lower socioeconomic status receive, particularly women and children, while preventing social stigmas?
- **5.** Think about ways to improve HIV/AIDS education in your country. What kind of measures currently exist? How can you elevate the importance of educating people about HIV/AIDS?
- **6.** How can you increase access and affordability of ART and other forms of care for poorer individuals living with HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other communicable diseases?



TERMS AND CONCEPTS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Member States: any country/sovereign state that has membership in the United Nations. Currently, there are 193 Member States of the United Nations.

Global health: the health of populations in a global context; health conerns that transcend the perspectives and concerns of individual nations.

Non-governmental organization (NGO): an organization that does not belong to or is not associated with any government and is not a conventional for-profit business.

CD4: stands for cluster of differentiation 4; a type of white blood cell that fights infection. A normal CD4 count in a healthy human being ranges anywhere between 500 to 1,500 per cubic millimeter of blood.

Stigma: a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

Antiretroviral therapy (ART): course of medications/drugs one takes to fight HIV to slow down the growth of the virus. ART will not necessarily kill the virus completely.

Sub-Saharan Africa: the area in Africa south of the Sahara Desert, with the exception of Sudan.

Stool: waste expelled from bowels; fecal matter.

Diarrheal disease: a symptom of infection in the intestinal tract, and is the second leading cause of death amongst children under age five; also known as diarrhea.

Cholera: an infection of the small intestine that causes a large amount of watery diarrhea; caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium Vibrio cholerae

Pandemic: a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects a large portion of general population.

Millenium Development Goals (MDGs): the UN Development Programme's plan to increase global development and eliminate extreme poverty by 2015.

UN Development Programme (UNDP): the UN's global development network that advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

UN Population Fund (UNPF): the UN development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man, and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. It supports countries in using population data for policies and programs to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and that every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

UN Children's Fund (UNICEF): the driving force that helps build a world where the rights of every child are realized. UNICEF has the global autority to influence decision-makers, and has a variety of partners at the grassroots level to help turn the most innovative ideas into realty.

World Bank: a collection of international organizations to aid countries in their process of economic development with loans, advice, and research. It is sometimes criticized for its control by powerful Western

Additional Resources

Websites

World Health Organization: WHO's website includes lots of easy-to-understand information about global health problems, iniatives, data, and recent pulbications. It also includes country profiles. http://www.who.int/en/



Eight Goals for 2015: Information on the Millennium Development Goals from UNDP. http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en.home/mdgoverview.html

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¹⁴ "MDG 6: combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases." World Health Organization. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Aug. 2013.