



Malaria Press Release No.1 11th of July 2022

Ministry of Health declare Malaria outbreak in certain areas

The Ministry of Health has declared a Malaria outbreak in certain areas of Vanuatu. These are: North East and West Coast Santo, South East Malekula, Epi Island and South East Vanua Lava (Sola).

Nationwide, there have been over 500 confirmed cases in the six-month period from January to June 2022. This represents a significant increase compared to last year, with only 322 cases reported for all of 2021. Based on the increase already noted in 2022, a high number of malaria cases is also expected in the second half of this year.

Excellent progress but upsurges in 2022

Vanuatu has made excellent progress against Malaria in the last 15 years and was approaching nationwide elimination of Malaria. Cases reduced each year, from over 10,000 in 2010 to just 322 cases in 2021. The Ministry of Health successfully eliminated Malaria from Tafea Province in 2017. Torba had two years with no reported local cases, and Penama has also had two years with no local cases.

However, malaria transmission recently re-started in areas with no cases for two years (in Torba) and transmission intensified in other areas. In 2022, malaria transmission has been particularly high in areas of North East and West Coast Santo, South East of Malekula, Epi Island and South East Vanua Lava (Sola), although cases occur in other areas of Vanuatu also. So far there is no evidence of high malaria transmission in or around Port Vila.

Experience from other countries approaching malaria elimination is that if efforts are interrupted, malaria can quickly rebound back to high levels. This is because there is no immunity against malaria (with no vaccine available), health workers are unfamiliar with the disease, treatment may not be available or prescribed appropriately, and there is complacency to finish treatment.

Transmission

Malaria is caused by parasites transmitted to human through the bite of infectious mosquitoes. The time from an infectious mosquito bite to onset of symptoms is usually 10 to 14 days. Anyone can catch malaria, especially if they have been in areas with high transmission.

Signs and Symptoms

Almost all Malaria cases in Vanuatu are caused by *Plasmodium vivax* parasites. The first symptoms of vivax malaria are usually headaches, fever and chills, though milder symptoms are possible including tiredness and body ache.

Left untreated, vivax malaria will generally recur over many months.

Testing and Treatment

Anyone with fever or symptoms of malaria should go to a health facility and get tested with a malaria Rapid Diagnostic Test. If confirmed to be positive, it is essential to complete the treatment to prevent recurrent symptoms and to protect others from Malaria.



Malaria Press Release No.1 11th of July 2022

Prevention

The Ministry of Health encourage everyone to sleep under a mosquito net each night to protect against malaria mosquitoes, which usually bite at night. It is important to clean-up around your house for any mosquito breeding sites (remove, bury, cover or destroy things that can collect water such as coconut shell, cans, bottles, tyres etc.)

Ministry of Health Response

The Ministry of Health is taking urgent actions in priority areas that include:

- Targeted testing and treatment of all those with Malaria;
- Handing out mosquito nets so everyone has access;
- Spraying insecticides inside houses to kill mosquitoes; and,
- Community awareness to communities on symptoms, prevention testing and treatments.

Advice for travellers to malaria areas of Vanuatu

If you plan to travel to areas with malaria, please ensure you follow basic prevention measures to protect against mosquito bites by:

- Wearing appropriate clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts and long pants;
- Applying an insect repellent (containing one of the following substances: DEET, picaridin, citriodiol, IR3535) to exposed skin

Travellers may consider taking prophylaxis. Consult your physician at least 2 weeks prior to departure to Vanuatu to get a proper dosage and duration of treatment.

The Ministry of Health will provide more information as the situation evolves.

Signature:



Dr. Jenny Stephens
Acting Director of Public Health



Malaria Press Release No.1 11th of July 2022

Note to editors

For more information go to:

- [Your closest health facility]
- Ministry of Health, Health Promotions Vanuatu Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Health-Promotions-Vanuatu-167426667566197/>

For more information, please contact: Acting Director, Dr Jenny Stephens, Acting Director of Public Health, 7710807, jstephens@vanuatu.go.vu.