



**Joint Press Release from the Centre for Parasitology, Entomology and
Malaria Control (CNM) Ministry of Health
Kingdom of Cambodia and the
World Health Organization (WHO)**



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Promising early results from anti-resistance malaria project

PHNOM PENH, 6 July 2010 - There are promising signs that efforts to eliminate malaria resistance along the Thai-Cambodia border are making significant gains.

Researchers have found that artemisinin-resistant malaria has almost disappeared from areas tested in a pilot project managed by the World Health Organization (WHO). Furthermore, the incidence of malaria, generally, has reduced significantly in the zone targeted by the project.

The results are from new intense screening being conducted as part of a \$22.5 million cross-border project – funded primarily by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - that is aiming to eliminate artemisinin-resistant malaria in the Thai-Cambodia border area.

Initial results from the screening of 2,782 people in seven Cambodian villages - Krochab Krom, Phnom Dambang, Oh Tatus, Oh Preus, Krachab Leu, Rothkros Chhes and Phnom Reang - found only two cases of falciparum malaria, the strain in which the artemisinin resistance has emerged. It is also the form of malaria that causes the most deaths. Only last year these seven villages in Pailin province were among the most malaria-affected in the border area.

Early last year WHO warned that parasites resistant to artemisinin had emerged along the Thai-Cambodian border, posing a serious threat to global efforts to control malaria. Artemisinin-based drugs are the most effective treatment against malaria and have been largely credited with the huge strides that have been made in the past decade to control the disease – which still kills about one million people each year, mostly in Africa.

WHO has been working intensely with the health ministries of Cambodia and Thailand, and other partners, to contain the resistant parasites, with the ultimate aim of eliminating them from the target zone. In the project's first year - among many other activities - it has distributed more than half a million mosquito nets and trained and equipped more than 3,000 village malaria workers to deliver free early diagnosis and treatment services on both sides of the border.

“It is early days, but all indications suggest that the prevention, screening and treatment measures we have introduced are significantly reducing the cases of malaria and, could ultimately eliminate the resistant parasites from the area,” says Dr Duong Socheat, Director of the National Centre for Malaria Control in Cambodia.

The new intense screening programme is part of a tool just introduced into the project that aims to find – and treat - any hidden cases of resistant malaria in the target villages. Since May this year, health teams have been attempting to screen all men, women and children in 20 villages along the border - even if they do not show signs of malaria. During the screening, blood samples are taken and then sent by taxi to the Pasteur Institute in Phnom Penh where they are tested using sophisticated technology - Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) - that can detect even one malarial parasite. The results are sent back to teams operating in the village who then

each individual case to ensure every positive case is treated effectively. Valuable information about remaining cases is also obtained through the process.

“This new way of using PCR technology means we can do mass genetic testing of samples at the Institute Pasteur in Cambodia on a scale that has not been done before,” says Dr Steven Bjorge, WHO’s team leader on malaria in Cambodia.

“We can now screen an entire village and have very accurate results back within about 4-5 days. The fast turn-around of the results is very important so that any cases can be followed up and treated in a short space of time, before people move out of a village.

“Previously it would take weeks to get results back from such a mass screening and, in the meantime, people move, so it was not effective. Our initial results suggest it is a very effective tool and feasible to implement in a target area.”

The artemisinin-resistance containment project is being implemented by the Government of Cambodia through its National Centre for Malaria Control and the Government of Thailand through its Bureau of Vector-Borne Diseases, along with other partners.

For more information please contact:

Centre for Malaria Control:

Dr Duong Socheat: +855 1281 5950

Dr Ngoun Sokomar: +855 1253 7273

World Health Organization:

Dr Pieter Van Maaren: +855 23216 610

Dr Najibullah Habib: +855 23 216 610

+855 (0) 1250 5566 (mobile)

Deirdre Martin: +855 (0) 12 443 993

