

Malaria

Since 2000, remarkable progress has been made in the fight against malaria. But these gains are under threat.

Malaria remains one of the world's deadliest diseases. Fragile health systems, weak surveillance and chronic funding shortfalls leave many countries vulnerable to this disease. At the same time, malaria is becoming harder to diagnose and control as antimalarial drug and insecticide resistance are on the rise, and invasive mosquito species are spreading, increasing the risk of transmission in urban areas. Intensified conflict, climate change and population displacement further jeopardize progress.

As a result, the number of people at risk is also increasing. Every day, more than 1,000 children under five die from malaria, and the disease also poses a serious threat to pregnant women, causing one in ten maternal deaths in regions where it is endemic. In 2024, nearly all the 282 million infections and 610,000 deaths occurred in sub-Saharan Africa.

How we work

At Unitaid, we save lives by making new health products available and affordable for people in low- and middle-income countries. We work with partners to identify innovative tools, technologies and approaches, help tackle the market barriers that are holding them back and get them to the people who need them most – fast.

To stay ahead of the malaria parasite and the mosquitoes that transmit it, constant innovation is needed. Unitaid plays a unique and vital role in helping promising products and interventions move from final development to regulatory approval and, ultimately, to introduction and scale-up in malaria endemic countries. By bridging this gap in the global health landscape, Unitaid ensures that lifesaving tools reach scale and impact where they are needed most.



Fighting to outpace resistance: Malaria parasites and the mosquitoes that transmit them have developed resistance to the recommended antimalarial medicines and the most common insecticides used to repel and kill them, threatening our strongest lines of defense. In some places, malaria is also becoming harder to diagnose because certain parasites no longer show up on the rapid tests that many countries rely on.

To address growing resistance to the most widely used antimalarial drugs, Unitaid is supporting the roll-out of multiple first-line therapies (MFTs). Through this approach, countries use more than one recommended malaria treatment at the same time, to avoid overreliance on a single medicine, reducing the pressure on any one drug and slowing the development of resistance.

We are also working to address resistance to insecticides. Unitaid is behind vital research that demonstrated the public health potential of spatial emanators and led to the first WHO endorsement of a new vector control tool in decades. These products that slowly release chemicals and can be placed in the home to ward off mosquitoes, reduce the risk of transmission by over 30%. Our current investments are investigating their effectiveness when used on their own and in humanitarian settings where other prevention tools may not be feasible.

Supporting countries to reach malaria

elimination targets: The most common type of malaria outside of sub-Saharan Africa is *P. vivax*, a complex and persistent form of the disease that poses a risk to more than one-third of the world's population. The parasite can remain in a person's liver even after successful treatment of the initial, blood-stage infection, causing recurring illness and contributing to onward transmission. We are leading real-world research aimed at advancing effective diagnostic tools and simpler treatments that can clear the parasite from the liver and have contributed to the development of the first child-friendly formulation of these drugs, helping to eliminate this insidious form of malaria.

Prioritizing the most vulnerable: Children under 5 account for about 75% of all malaria-related deaths. Pregnant women and children under 10 account for almost all the rest. Our work helped launch seasonal malaria chemoprevention, now recognized as a highly effective prevention method that delivers antimalarial drugs to young children during the rainy season, when infections spike. By addressing several barriers at once – feasibility, insufficient drug supplies, and cost – we helped lay the foundations for an approach that now protects 54 million children each year. Building on these efforts, we are now testing effective ways to deliver malaria prevention to children under 2 in different geographies and have developed methods to reach more pregnant women with malaria prevention too.

Meanwhile, we're working to promote sustainable supplies of locally manufactured, quality, preventive drugs. Our targeted interventions, such as those aimed at reaching people with the preventive care they need, where they live, or piloting implementation of the first-ever malaria vaccine to provide protection to young children, we put the people most at risk of malaria at the center of our response.

Our impact

We achieve our impact through collaboration with partners across the global health sector. Our interventions target the complex range of factors that can prevent a good idea from becoming a global health success. As such, the full impact of our work is achieved several years after our work is done, once governments and partners step in to replicate proven models and roll out new tools on a wide scale. Together with our partners, we play an essential role in advancing the tools and approaches needed to meet global targets to reduce malaria cases and deaths by 90% by 2030. This includes:



Getting seasonal malaria chemoprevention off the ground,

which now reaches 54 million children and saves more than 100,000 young lives each year, and supporting adoption of perennial malaria chemoprevention, which reached nearly 1 million children under 24 months in eight countries in 2024.



Proving the effectiveness of dual-active ingredient mosquito nets and rapidly bringing them to market.

With 56 million nets distributed under the New Nets project, and over 80 million in 2024 alone, the novel tool is expected to reach more than 800 million people by 2030.



Demonstrating community-based antimalarial distribution to reach pregnant women,

which is estimated will prevent 1 million cases of malaria in pregnancy, 180,000 episodes of low birth weight, and around 40,000 deaths of mother and baby every year when implemented widely.



Vaccinating 2 million children through malaria vaccine pilots,

providing the evidence that underpinned the World Health Organization's recommendation. As of April 2025, more than 24 million doses had been delivered to 20 African countries through Gavi, the vaccine alliance.



Case Study:

Prevention on the doorstep

In a previous pregnancy, Dorcas was infected with malaria and delivered twins – one healthy, and one in need of lifesaving treatment to survive, because of the disease. In her most recent pregnancy, she connected with a community health worker who brought malaria care right to her door. “With previous pregnancies, I started antenatal care after 6 or even 7 months, but with this pregnancy, I started in my third month,” Dorcas says. “Now, I have already taken my malaria medicine twice.” The community health worker was part of a Unitaid initiative to pilot community-led delivery of antimalarial medicines to pregnant women at home and link them with antenatal services for a healthy pregnancy and safe birth. Building off previous successes with seasonal malaria chemoprevention, this combination of making the right medicine and the right care available at the right time has increased coverage of malaria prevention in pregnancy by an average of 35 percentage points – and up to 50% in some settings. The impact of this work reaches far beyond Dorcas and her community. Governments and partners are now working to replicate this model in other malaria-endemic countries. Taken to scale, it is expected to benefit approximately 7 million additional women and prevent nearly 40,000 maternal and infant deaths every year.

Photo: Dorcas takes her malaria medicine provided by a community health worker who brought malaria care right to her door. © Unitaid

Future-proofing the malaria response

Progress against malaria has stalled since 2015, and gains remain fragile. Unitaid is working with partners to meet the greatest challenges to malaria head on. We are designing solutions to mitigate antimalarial resistance and protect the most promising new medicines in development. As more people migrate to cities, we are taking action to address the growing threat of malaria in urban environments, and we are pushing ahead with new vector control tools to build layers of protection.

We know no single tool will end malaria. That’s why we are advancing on all fronts, from supporting the roll-out of multiple first-line therapies to novel spatial emanators. We come at access from several angles at the same time so that once an intervention is proven feasible and effective, there are adequate, high-quality supplies available – at affordable prices – so we can quickly deliver them and reach more people.

To stay ahead, we conduct landscape analyses to identify promising innovations, including genetically modified mosquitoes. Through rigorous research, we will continue to gather the evidence needed to guide our investments, demonstrate the effectiveness of selected innovative approaches and ensure that these are affordable and available everywhere they are needed.

About Unitaid:

We save lives by making new health products available and affordable for people in low- and middle-income countries. We work with partners to identify innovative treatments, tests and tools, help tackle the market barriers that are holding them back, and get them to the people who need them most – fast. Since we were created in 2006, we have unlocked access to more than 100 groundbreaking health products to help address the world’s biggest health challenges, including HIV, TB, and malaria; women’s and children’s health; and pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. Every year, more than 300 million people benefit from the products we’ve helped roll out.