

Cuba Observes World Health Day 2014



World Health Day is held every April 7th to draw attention to particular priorities in global health and this year was dedicated to the control of vectors that transmit diseases.

World Health Day 2014 spotlighted some of the most commonly known vectors – such as mosquitoes, sandflies, bugs, ticks and snails – responsible for transmitting a wide range of parasites and pathogens that can cause many different illnesses.

Mosquitoes, for example, transmit malaria- the most deadly vector-borne disease, causing an estimated 660,000 deaths annually worldwide - as well as dengue fever, lymphatic filariasis, chikungunya, Japanese encephalitis and yellow fever.

The goal of the World Health Day 2014 campaign was better protection from vector-borne diseases, especially for families living in areas where diseases are transmitted by vectors, and travelers to countries where they pose a health threat.

The campaign also advocated that health authorities in countries where vector-borne diseases are a public health problem or emerging threat, put in place measures to improve surveillance and protection.

Dr. José Luis Di Fabio, Cuba's representative of both the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) and World Health Organization (WHO), told ACN that the theme was chosen in order to identify the global problem and take appropriate synchronous measures.

"Protect yourself and your environment from disease vectors: Small bites, big threats," is the motto for this year. The central activity in Cuba took place on Monday in the Havana municipality of Guanabacoa and included a marathon organized by the INDER and cultural and recreational activities.

The WHO says that these conditions affect a large number of countries, principally in the region of the Americas and among the highest incidence include malaria, dengue fever, chagas, leishmaniasis and lymphatic filariasis or elephantiasis.

Di Fabio stressed that vector-borne infectious diseases are spread by insects and snails that carry viruses, parasites and bacteria to humans and constitute a high rate of morbidity and mortality for individuals, their families and communities, especially in the poorest nations.

An official said that most of the population of the 35 countries of the region except Canada and continental Chile, co-exists with the mosquito *Aedes aegypti*, which can transmit the dengue virus, chikungunya and yellow fever .

The PAHO-WHO representative warned that in recent decades, Latin America has become the region with the highest figures in the world and said that Cuba does not escape the threat posed by these vectors.

In recent press statements Dr. Ileana Morales, head of the department for the control of *Aedes aegypti*, in the Ministry of Public Health, reiterated that the national surveillance program has universal vector control coverage and is preventive in nature. It is intended to prevent formation and replication foci, as well as destroying those that are found.

The purpose of vector control is to limit contact between humans and vectors, and to reduce vector populations or their life expectancy so that they are unable to transmit disease. Vector control rarely relies on a single intervention.

Whenever possible, environmental, biological and chemical (use of insecticides) control measures complement each other in what is known as integrated vector management.

In order to effectively control vectors, it is necessary to precisely identify them, to be familiar with their biology, their behaviour towards humans and their exact role in disease transmission. Only thus is it possible to undertake control measures and to intervene effectively.

Cuba currently has high levels of infestation in 27 municipalities, including the headwaters of some provinces and in all Havana's municipalities, and the main factors that encourage their growth are related to climatic changes that encourage greater infestation and increased numbers of unsafe reservoirs, stressed Dr. Morales.

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