

## Targetting vector-borne diseases

Today more than 80% of the world's population is at risk of vector-borne disease, with half at risk of two or more diseases. The spread of Zika virus disease, the resurgence of dengue, and the emerging threat from chikungunya were the result of weak mosquito control policies from the 1970s. It was during that decade that funding and efforts for vector control were greatly reduced.

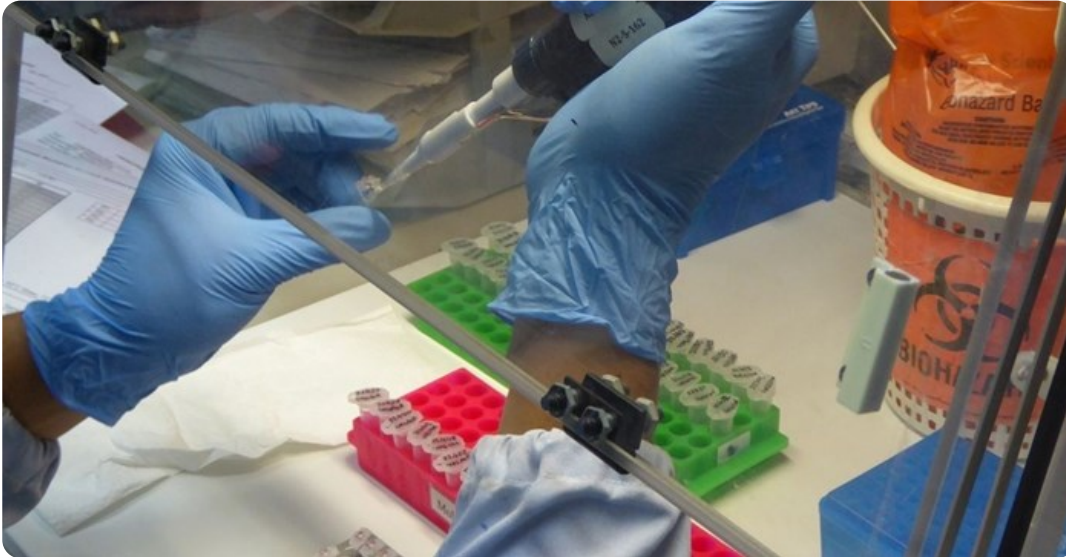


Photo: Malaria Consortium

"What we are seeing now looks more and more like a dramatic resurgence of the threat from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases," Dr Margaret Chan told member states at the 69th World Health Assembly. "The world is not prepared to cope."

### 'Vector control has not been a priority'

Dr Ana Carolina Silva Santelli has witnessed this first-hand. As former head of the programme for malaria, dengue, Zika and chikungunya with Brazil's ministry of health, she saw vector-control efforts wane over her 13 years there. Equipment such as spraying machines, supplies such as insecticides and personnel such as entomologists were not replaced as needed. "Vector control has not been a priority," she said.

### Causes and carriers

Mosquitoes can transmit, among other diseases, malaria, lymphatic filariasis, Japanese encephalitis and West Nile; flies can transmit onchocerciasis, leishmaniasis and human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness); and bugs or ticks can transmit Chagas disease, Lyme disease and encephalitis.

Together, the major vector-borne diseases kill more than 700,000 people each year, with populations in poverty-stricken tropical and subtropical areas at highest risk. Other vector-borne diseases, such as tick-borne encephalitis, are of increasing concern in temperate regions.

Rapid unplanned urbanisation, massive increases in international travel and trade, altered agricultural practices and other environmental changes are fuelling the spread of vectors worldwide, putting more and more people at risk. Malnourished people and those with weakened immunity are especially susceptible.

## **A new approach**

Over the past year, WHO has spearheaded a new strategic approach to reprioritise vector control. The Global Malaria Programme and the Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases – along with the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, have led a broad consultation tapping into the experience of ministries of health and technical experts.

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