

WHO claims gains in global fight against malaria

December 14 2010

(AP) -- A massive malaria control program since 2008 has helped reduce infections across Africa and eradicate the disease in Morocco and Turkmenistan, but a slowdown in funding risks undoing those achievements, the World Health Organization said Tuesday.

Funding for the U.N.'s anti-malaria program reached \$1.8 billion this year, helping buy [insecticide](#), drugs and bed nets for millions affected by the mosquito-borne disease.

This contributed to a drop of over 50 percent in malaria cases in 11 African countries, and in two-thirds of the 56 malaria-endemic countries outside Africa, WHO Director-General Margaret Chan told reporters in Geneva.

Globally, the number of infections has decreased slightly from 233 million at the start of the millenium to 225 million in 2009, even as populations in poor countries swell. Deaths fell to 781,000 last year, compared with 985,000 in 2000.

Chan warned that the goal of eliminating malaria deaths worldwide by 2015 was at risk because the amount of money needed to combat the disease - estimated by WHO at \$6 billion a year - is still a long way off being met.

In at least three [African countries](#) malaria has made a comeback. Rwanda, Zambia, and Sao Tome and Principe saw increased numbers of

cases in 2009, indicating how fragile achievements in combating the disease can be.

WHO said another concern was the growing number of cases where the main treatment, Artemisinin-based [combination therapy](#) or ACTs, proves ineffective against the parasite that causes malaria. Drug-resistant infections were first detected at the Cambodia-Thailand border in 2009.

Chan called for weaker, single-drug therapies that are still sold in many developing countries to be banned, as they could encourage widespread resistance to ACTs with catastrophic results.

"We are down to the last effective medicine to treat [malaria](#)," she said. "If we lose Artemisinin, we are back to square one."

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