

World Malaria Day: Research into a more efficient treatment for 'vivax malaria'

April 29 2013



Whilst investment has been increasing in the past years into new treatments for the potentially fatal "malaria tropica", efficient treatment options are still lacking for "vivax malaria". This is a form of malaria which, if left untreated, recurs over and over again for years and, as a result, is very difficult to control. In many regions, such as, for example, in large parts of Asia and South America, this type of malaria is already the most common one. In contrast, in Africa today the region around Ethiopia is almost exclusively affected. In several projects the MedUni Vienna is researching new treatment possibilities for this form of malaria.

"Although there is a drug with which vivax malaria can be treated effectively, it does however have to be taken for two weeks, which is not realisable, or hardly ever, in practice, particularly in Africa," explains Harald Noedl of the Institute for Specific [Prophylaxis](#) and [Tropical Medicine](#) which has been leading a research project belonging to the MedUni Vienna in Ethiopia since 2012. "Those affected give up taking the medication after only a few days."

The aim is to find a more efficient and shorter form of treatment and to understand the disease better, which has been underestimated for a long time and was classified as being rather benign. Whilst in many regions in Africa people cannot fall sick with vivax malaria due to their [genetic disposition](#), this is still the most frequent form of malaria in parts of Ethiopia.

Says Noedl: "Our [research projects](#) therefore do not only concentrate on the analysis of the disease's [pathogens](#) but also on the influence of [human genetics](#) on the course of the disease in order to derive new [treatment strategies](#). We want to clarify why vivax malaria is so predominant precisely here."

The project in Ethiopia is based on the collaboration agreement the MedUni Vienna has concluded with the university in Gondar. Since 2006 the Center for Geographic Medicine (CGM) of the MedUni Vienna has been working on research into malaria in Bangladesh. With the project in Ethiopia and further collaborations, the MedUni Vienna wants to position itself as a leading centre on malaria and establish a worldwide malaria network.

"Latent" infections cause relapses

Vivax malaria is a serious illness with a high fever which, if left untreated, persists for several weeks. However, it is also capable of

forming long-lasting dormant stages in the liver, so-called "sleepers", which can lead to repeated relapses. "It is precisely with this kind of malaria that we need, as also in our project in Bangladesh, to break the vicious circle of illness and poverty in order to be able to help people long-term on a lasting basis," says the scientist from the MedUni Vienna on the occasion of World Malaria Day on 25th April 2013, which this year has the motto "Invest in the future. Defeat malaria."

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) approximately 200 million people suffer from malaria every year. It is thus – despite sinking mortality rates – responsible for 660,000 deaths a year. The aim of the WHO is to achieve a 75 percent reduction in new cases by the year 2015. In this the fight against vivax malaria plays an important role.

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

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