Reducing the unacceptable burden of neglected tropical diseases

Addressing Diseases of Poverty in the Western Pacific Region

Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis
Shrinking the map: Elimination of lymphatic filariasis in the Western Pacific

A drawing from the late 12th century showing a woman with elephantiasis: “Byosoushi-emakimono” (Tokyo National Museum).
Overview

Lymphatic filariasis, also known as elephantiasis, is a neglected tropical disease which causes disability and stigmatization among the most vulnerable populations in the world. It exists in 22 countries and areas in the WHO Western Pacific Region. The World Health Organization has a goal of eliminating lymphatic filariasis globally by 2020. In the Region, WHO has verified elimination in three countries. Based on current progress, ten more should be verified by 2016. Achieving this goal will contribute to poverty alleviation and protect future generations from this disfiguring disease.

Vietnamese children who will benefit from elimination of lymphatic filariasis.
Lymphatic filariasis is a parasitic infection caused by worms that are transmitted to people by mosquitoes. Infection with these worms can cause:
- swelling of genitals, requiring surgery
- swelling of the limbs and breasts, requiring daily washing to prevent worsening of disease
- swollen limbs with thickened, hard, rough skin (elephantiasis), requiring life-long care.

What is lymphatic filariasis?

Lymphatic filariasis is acquired early in life, but severe disability develops years later and keeps adults from participating in economic and community activities. Timely treatment can prevent, halt, or even reverse disability.
Why is eliminating lymphatic filariasis feasible?

The strategy to eliminate lymphatic filariasis has two pillars:
Stopping transmission by giving all at-risk individuals medicines once a year for at least five years.
Managing disease through teaching patients to care for themselves and providing surgery for those who need it.
The strategy is low cost and effective:
Medicines are safe and come with available donation packages.
China and the Republic of Korea already eliminated lymphatic filariasis due to strong political commitment, dedicated national budgets and good community support.
More than US$40 million has been saved in health-care costs through preventing infection and disease progression in the Region.
What is needed to shrink the map?

Ten countries and areas are in the final stages of lymphatic filariasis elimination and need to collect information to verify that transmission has stopped.

Approximately US$2 million over the next five years is needed to support these countries and areas.

These countries and areas are:
- American Samoa
- Cambodia
- Cook Islands
- Marshall Islands
- Niue
- Tonga
- Vanuatu
- Viet Nam
- Wallis and Futuna
- Palau or the Federated States of Micronesia or New Caledonia
Progress towards lymphatic filariasis elimination

Unfinished business:
Eliminating lymphatic filariasis ensures that future generations will be protected from infection and disabling disease.
A small amount of resources will enable us to conclude this ‘unfinished’ business in the Region’s development agenda.
About the World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. The Organization is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries, and monitoring and assessing health trends. The Regional Office for the Western Pacific, located in Manila, Philippines, represents the Organization in 37 Asian and Pacific island countries and areas.

The World Health Organization comparative advantage

Long-term involvement in lymphatic filariasis programmes
Convening power to bring multiple stakeholders together
Close links to ministries of health
Network of WHO country offices and support
Ability to integrate with other disease programmes, synergizing with well-established interventions such as the Expanded Programme on Immunization.

CONTACT ADDRESS:
Coordinator, External Relations and Communications,
Office of the Regional Director
World Health Organization
Western Pacific Regional Office
PO. Box 2932 United Nations Avenue
1000 Manila, Philippines
Telephone: +63 2 528 9839
Email: erc@wpro.who.int
Website: www.wpro.who.int/mvp