

## ***Of Malaria – A Compendium of Thoughts and Resources about Reducing the Malaria Burden***



**Malaria causes the death of a child every minute in Africa.** 655,000 deaths occur annually in the world due to malaria with 98% of them in Africa where it is the second leading cause of death. Children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years of age and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable because their immune systems are underdeveloped or weakened. Roughly 86% of 2010 malaria-related deaths occurred among children younger than five.

Malaria is an infection of a parasite called Plasmodium spread by infected mosquitoes. It flourishes in warm, tropical climates and particularly affects poor countries. In humans, the infection spreads from the bite on the skin to the liver and then infects red blood cells. These infected red blood cells can disrupt blood flow to vital organs. Symptoms include fever, headache, chills, and vomiting. Many times these symptoms can be ignored or misdiagnosed and can quickly lead to death. Pastor Ann's story is a particularly poignant demonstration of this scenario (<http://blog.lwr.org/2011/02/pastor-anna-women-thrive>).

Effective methods are already in place for reducing the burden of malaria. A cheap and perhaps the simplest is the use of mosquito nets treated with insecticide. By a UNICEF report, sleeping under the nets, which repel malaria-carrying mosquitoes, can reduce overall child mortality by 20% and reinfection by 40-60%. Other studies have shown a reduction in mortality in those less than 4 years of age up to 55% with the combination of the nets with indoor insecticides. In a decade, it has been estimated that bed nets have saved the lives of 750,000 children in Africa. While the nets are becoming more common, there are still insufficient numbers of them in most countries affected by malaria. Part of the problem lies in the education of the people to use them. Both the nets and the education of the people require funding.

Other ways of reducing the malaria burden include medications for treating and also preventing infection. Malaria prevention medications in pregnancy resulted in a 35% reduction in low birth weight infants. If diagnosed and treated early, malaria can be cured and transmission reduced. However, few nations that are affected by malaria can afford the medications on a large scale or even the quick diagnostic tools.

Education is a key component in the fight to reduce the impact of malaria. Migration of susceptible people into malaria-prone areas can cause large groups to be affected by malaria because of lack of instruction in the disease process. A study in 2010, demonstrated significant reduction of cases of malaria in the less than 5 years of age after families were instructed in methods of prevention. Again, funding is needed to provide the materials and instructors to utilize the available resources.

Over the last decade, research demonstrates a reduction in deaths in Africa from malaria by one third but as much as 50% outside of Africa. This fact points to the need for more intensive efforts to be directed to the countries in Africa. Support from many avenues is critical to ensure the progress made continues to save lives and reduce morbidity. Malaria prevention and control can cost an African family up to 25% of their income. Also, the economic burden of illness on each household can be large and in some situations overwhelming. The ELCA Malaria Campaign is committed to aiding in the funding that works toward reducing the malaria burden.



**Additional Resources:**

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