

Rising Malaria Threat: How to Keep the Workforce Healthy

KUALA LUMPUR , MALAYSIA, April 26, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Malaria remains a significant global threat, causing over 240 million infections in 2022, with nearly half the world's population at risk. With World Malaria Day approaching on 25 April, International SOS is calling on organisations to join the fight against this potentially deadly but highly preventable disease. This year's theme, "Accelerating the fight against malaria for a more equitable world," underscores the urgent need for collective action, particularly as malaria cases are on the rise.



International SOS global assistance data reports a 15% increase in malaria-related assistance requests in 2023 compared to 2022. Data reveals that 57% of cases were concentrated in Asia, primarily impacting the mining industry, while 40% occurred in Africa, mainly affecting oil and gas, mining, and NGO personnel. These figures align with data from the World Health Organization (WHO), which demonstrates that both the Africa region and the South-East Asia region have the highest estimated malaria burden globally. The WHO also conservatively projects 250,000 additional yearly deaths by the 2030s due to climate change impacts on diseases including malaria.

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Dr Irene Lai

Dr Irene Lai, Global Medical Director at International SOS, comments “Malaria is transmitted through mosquito bites, and although there are very effective ways to prevent being bitten, there are no guarantees. It is a serious illness that can be rapidly fatal. Travellers who are from areas that don't have malaria, along with infants and young children, are at higher risk of severe illness and death if they get infected. All organisations with travellers to or operations in areas with malaria should assess the risk and ensure they have policies and procedures in place to mitigate that risk. This includes providing pre-travel education and medical consultations,

mosquito-bite prevention supplies and preventive medications (chemoprophylaxis) and ensuring access to prompt diagnosis and treatment. Through the provision of malaria awareness programmes, bed nets and contribution to mosquito control activities, organisations can create a healthier and more productive environment for both their employees and the surrounding communities.”

Dr Dave Knight, Occupational Medicine Physician and Malaria Specialist at International SOS, comments “Malaria transmission patterns are demonstrably shifting, with climate change as a significant factor we must consider. It is predicted with climate change that this risk could grow, and malaria transmission could spread into countries previously free of malaria. Furthermore, there are no ground-shifting technology solutions imminent over the next few years that will allow significant mitigation of this risk in a company workforce. We still rely on age-old interventions. At the same time, we are also seeing growing mosquito resistance to insecticides and the first troubling reports from Africa of potential parasite resistance to current malaria treatment. This will require better funding and coordination of efforts to develop new classes of insecticide along with bringing to market new anti-malaria medicines at reasonable cost, as well as improving current malaria programmes. Programmes need to be scientifically designed and governed by experts that understand these challenges.

On a positive note, the new RTS,S vaccine is being rolled out in high transmission areas in Africa to infants and young children. It is not suitable for adults yet provides moderate but important protection to very young children over the first few years of life. It has recently been shown that new types of insecticide-treated bed nets that combine two compounds to counter resistance are 50% more effective at preventing malaria. The private sector should support vaccine and bed net initiatives in communities within which they operate where appropriate.”

International SOS outlines how organisations can help in the fight against malaria

1. Raise awareness: provide education for the workforce and local community about the risk of malaria and prevention measures.
2. Implement an integrated malaria control programme: review the malaria-risk to their workforce.
3. Invest in prevention: provide preventive supplies such as insect repellent and anti-malarial medicine (both prophylactic and treatment medicine), as well as access to pre-travel medical review for travelling employees.
4. Ensure access to medical care: prompt diagnosis and treatment is life-saving.
5. Support local initiatives: partner with NGOs and healthcare institutions working to combat malaria in the communities where the organisation operates.

International SOS reminds travellers of the ABCDE approach to malaria prevention

Awareness: be Aware of the risk and the symptoms.

Bite prevention: avoid being Bitten by mosquitoes.

Chemoprophylaxis: if prescribed for, use Chemoprophylaxis (antimalarial medication) to prevent infection.

Diagnosis: immediately seek Diagnosis and treatment if a fever develops one week or more after being in a malarial area.

Emergency: carry an Emergency Standby Treatment (EST) kit if available and recommended (the kit contains malaria treatment).

International SOS also provides consulting services for every part of a company's malaria risk mitigation programme. This includes experienced entomology consulting, assessment and design of vector control programmes, medical consulting to ensure proper diagnostic and treatment pathways and data management, as well as audit and review to ensure a programme is well managed. International SOS also has a Malaria Awareness eLearning available to educate employees.

Join International SOS webinar 'Climate Change and Malaria: Navigating the Global Health Landscape' on 7 May, where our experts will discuss the relationship between climate change and malaria.

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