Malaria: The Beat Continues in the Time of COVID-19

Every year on April 25, the world comes together to mark World Malaria Day. It is an occasion to highlight the need for continued investment and sustained political commitment for malaria prevention and control. This year, World Malaria Day finds us in an extraordinary time. The time of COVID-19. During this time, many countries, particularly, in sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for more than 90% of global malaria cases and deaths, are facing a double challenge of protecting their citizens against existing and emerging threats to public health. The pandemic places an extra burden on health systems worldwide, and especially in countries with fragile health systems.

Every 2 minutes a child dies of malaria somewhere in the world. According to World Health Organization (WHO), in 2018, nearly 900,000 children in 38 African countries were born with a low birth weight due to malaria in pregnancy, and children under five still accounted for two-thirds of all malaria deaths worldwide. Despite on-going challenges to effectively eradicate diseases, battling malaria has been one of the great health successes having dropped by 60% in the last 20 years the death rates to malaria. Still, the beat must continue until we end malaria.

While current circumstances mean that we practice physical distancing and social solidarity, it is indeed possible to unite for collective action towards strengthening health systems that can help us beat COVID-19 and malaria. Such collective action includes ‘Malaria: The Beat Continues’ an initiative by Youth Leaders for Health (YL4H). YL4H is enabling a popular platform for socializing at a distance for young and energetic population to communicate passionately their desire to end Malaria and build a strong public health system that can take on any challenge – including COVID-19. Check out some amazing YL4H video messages.

‘Malaria: The Beat Continues’ aims at urging African and world leaders to ensure that access to life-saving malaria prevention, diagnosis and treatment services continue in the time of COVID-19. It also urges them to invest in strengthening health systems that are key to the fight against malaria and COVID-19. Countries in Africa must ensure the beat continues considering:

- Africa’s relatively weak health systems are already overstretched by the high burden of other infectious diseases, including malaria.
- $2 billion annual gap, globally, in malaria funding to develop transformative tools and reach the most vulnerable people with the life-saving malaria interventions they need.
- COVID-19 could stop progress towards ending malaria as well as HIV and TB epidemics.
- With the current crisis, we’re already seeing health workers, resources, and attention diverted from existing programs.
- In the time of COVID-19, it’s critical that Africa maintains case detection and treatment coverage for other highly prevalent co-morbidities – such as malaria, TB, HIV, and undernutrition.
- COVID-19 notwithstanding, African nations still need to deliver on malaria commitments —along with commitments in other epidemics and non-communicable diseases

For World Malaria Day, join ‘Malaria: The Beat Continues’ towards stronger health systems, which are the world’s first line of defense against existing and emerging diseases. #TheBeatContinues #ZeroMalariaStartsWithMe

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