

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
Seventieth Session  
Cairo, Egypt, 9–12 October 2023**

**October 2023**

**A sustainable, integrated approach to prevention, control and elimination of vector-borne diseases**

**Objectives of the event**

On 9 October 2023, a technical discussion will be held on a sustainable, integrated approach to the prevention, control and elimination of vector-borne diseases.

The objectives of the event are to:

- brief Member States on an integrated approach to the prevention, control and elimination of vector-borne diseases, including vector surveillance;
- brief Member States on the technical framework for mainstreaming preparedness and response to vector-borne diseases, including vector control, as an essential component of a resilient health system;
- propose collaborative action for WHO and countries to build on the malaria programme platform and improve the prevention, management and control of vector-borne diseases beyond outbreak response.

**Background**

The burden of vector-borne diseases has increased by 11% in the Eastern Mediterranean Region since 2015,<sup>1</sup> causing substantial human suffering in terms of death and disability. The main vector-borne diseases affecting countries in the Region are malaria, leishmaniasis, dengue, chikungunya, yellow fever, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever and onchocerciasis. Most of the countries are endemic for multiple vector-borne diseases, with Somalia, Sudan and Yemen facing the largest number of these diseases. The impact of vector-borne diseases, their expanding geographical range, the aggravating effects of climate and ecological changes, and frequent outbreaks put further strain on already weak health systems in the Region. Vector-borne diseases also have significant economic impacts including lost workdays, school absences, and harm to tourism and foreign investment.

This technical discussion will outline an integrated approach to prevention, control and elimination of vector-borne diseases, including vector surveillance, to guide country and WHO responses. The experience, infrastructure and success of malaria control programmes in the Region provide a strong foundation for addressing other vector-borne diseases through adapted strategies, including vector control and surveillance. Community engagement, a critical component of successful malaria control, can raise awareness and support for a comprehensive approach towards vector-borne disease control. In addition, in countries approaching malaria elimination, a strong integrated vector-borne disease control programme will be the most sustainable way to prevent re-establishment of malaria transmission.

Key elements of a country-owned, integrated programmatic approach to malaria and other vector-borne diseases include: integrated vector surveillance, control and response, based in a unit with a cross-disease mandate, including investment in capacity-building of the workforce integrated diagnosis and case management; integrated surveillance, as part of the regional integrated disease surveillance initiative; multisectoral coordination mechanisms, including the environment and agriculture sectors; strengthened pesticide management; and a monitoring and evaluation framework. Strategic, cost-effective and sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> Global health observatory: disease burden 2000-2019 [online database]. Geneva: World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/mortality-and-global-health-estimates/global-health-estimates-leading-causes-of-dalys>, accessed 12 April 2023).

investment in integrated management of vector-borne diseases will increase the resilience of health systems and their ability to adjust to changes in disease eco-epidemiology.

### **Challenges in the Region**

Many countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region are experiencing complex humanitarian emergencies and consequent population movements, significantly increasing the risk of outbreaks of vector-borne diseases. The heterogeneous and complex eco-epidemiology of malaria and other vector-borne diseases is a further challenge. In the Region, the response to vector-borne disease threats has been fragmented in terms of diseases (malaria, dengue, neglected tropical diseases) and areas of work (vector control, diagnosis, surveillance, case management and outbreak response). Other challenges that are affecting control efforts include: inadequate infrastructure for vector surveillance and control, including at points of entry; insufficient allocation of domestic and external resources to vector-borne diseases; delays in outbreak detection and response; insufficient human resources for medical entomology, vector surveillance and vector control; lack of strategic information to guide decision-making, policies and strategies; poor community engagement and health education; weak collaboration across sectors; and limited experience in pesticide management.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Member States briefed on an integrated approach to prevention, control and elimination of vector-borne diseases, including vector surveillance.
- Discussion of a technical framework to guide Member States and the Secretariat in mainstreaming preparedness and response to vector-borne diseases including vector control, as an essential component of a resilient health system, along with necessary resources.