

Red Cross Red Crescent to tackle malaria during Togo measles campaign

In the biggest health intervention of its kind to date, 730,000 households in Togo will receive an insecticide-treated bed net (ITN) to combat malaria in conjunction with a mass measles vaccination campaign, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies announced on the occasion of Africa Malaria Day. Togo registers some 350,000 malaria cases every year, and the whole country is vulnerable to the mosquito-borne disease.

As part of an integrated campaign, scheduled for mid-December and in which the Togolese Red Cross will play an important mobilising role, some 730,000 bed nets will be distributed throughout the West African country, targeting children under the age of five or expectant mothers. This is the first time global public health partners involved in the Measles Initiative have targeted an entire country for bed net distribution, following two successful pilot schemes in Ghana in 2002 and Zambia in 2003.

“The integration of malaria into mass measles campaigns has already been tested and shown to be not only feasible but also one of the most cost-effective public health interventions for reducing child mortality and morbidity,” says Nick Farrell, head of the Federation’s Africa Health Initiative. “Using the platform of measles immunization activities, an ITN can be delivered to a child for less than \$0.50. In addition, we can capitalize on the mobilization of the population to achieve a broader health impact, reaching poorer and more isolated communities who are not reached by conventional distributions.”

With integrated campaigns gaining ground, donors have been quick to support the concept. The bed net distribution in Togo has received backing from the Norwegian and Canadian Red Cross Societies, the government development agencies of both countries, Rotarians Against Malaria and the International Federation Foundation Board.

Dr. Antoinette Awaga, Togo Red Cross Health Coordinator, points out that the sustainability of the campaign is vital, with the Togo Red Cross playing a central role in the follow-up process, ensuring that the nets are being used correctly: “Not only will we achieve high bed net coverage in less than two weeks, we will also provide longer-term community support to sustain the intervention and to ‘prime the pump’ for the commercial bed net sector,” Dr. Awaga adds.

The Togo campaign is part of wider efforts to dramatically reduce measles deaths in Africa. The partners - who include the American Red Cross, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the UN Foundation and the International Federation – have succeeded in vaccinating 115 million children in 25 countries in the first three years of the campaign.

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The Federation, the national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. For further information on Federation activities, please see our web site: www.ifrc.org