

South-East Asia countries to intensify efforts to control dengue, eliminate malaria

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New Delhi: Countries in WHO South-East Asia have resolved to accelerate efforts to control dengue which threatens nearly 1.3 billion people with frequent and largescale outbreaks, and control malaria, that continues to be endemic in the Region.

“We need to intensify multi-sectoral approach at the national as well as the grassroots level to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized communities, strengthen surveillance, operationalize cross-border collaboration and most importantly promote vector control,” Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director WHO South-East Asia, said at the Seventy-first Regional Committee session, which concluded here today.

The 11-Member countries of the Region which accounts for one-fourth of the global population, 58% of the global burden of *Plasmodium vivax* malaria, and is at increasing risk of dengue and other vector borne diseases in view of the increasing urbanization and climate change, adopted a resolution to prioritize dengue control and malaria elimination.

Reviewing the progress, challenges, capacities and opportunities for strengthening health

workforce, the countries agreed to continue to focus on frontline workers, improve rural retention and transformative education, and increase coordination between health and other ministries.

To further advance health of newborns, children and mothers, the countries agreed to enhance budgets and address social inequities. They emphasized that integrated approach with reproductive newborn, maternal, child and adolescent health programmes activities are at the heart of universal health coverage and for ensuring quality of care while “leaving no one behind”.

Monitoring progress against universal health coverage (UHC) and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals, the Member countries agreed to continue to develop and implement policies to advance equity and efficiency.

The Regional Committee session adopted the ‘Delhi Declaration’ with Member countries committing to make essential medical products accessible and affordable to all, both within the Region and beyond.

The session adopted another resolution which seeks to strengthen emergency medical teams (EMTs) to enhance preparedness in WHO South-East Asia, prone to natural disasters.

The Member countries welcomed expansion of the mandate of South-East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund (SEARHEF), from response to preparedness, to be better equipped to handle disasters. The SEARHEF has supported 37 emergencies in nine countries of the Region since its inception a decade ago, meeting immediate needs of affected communities, and save lives.