

# NTD News

NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES NEWSLETTER



@Makoto Sekihara (JICA)

The Papua New Guinea National Department of Health (NDOH) began the first lymphatic filariasis (LF) transmission assessment survey (TAS) in the country, which determine whether the LF infections have been reduced below the target thresholds at which mosquitoes are unable to continue spreading the parasites from person to person and new infections are prevented, and thus MDA can stop, in New Ireland Province in December 2020. TAS training for the provincial team was held on 4 December 2020, facilitated by NDOH, WHO and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), following which school-based TAS started.

## 1 NEWS FROM MEMBER COUNTRIES

### American Samoa

In September 2020, the US Centers for Disease Control (USCDC) and the Pacific Island Health Officers' Association (PIHOA) led a virtual training to prepare the Department of Health to carry out an impact assessment following the second round of mass drug administration (MDA) using the triple drug therapy with a combination of ivermectin, diethylcarbamazine (DEC), and albendazole (IDA) against lymphatic filariasis (LF). During September-October 2020, the Department of Health conducted the impact assessment in eight villages known to have persistent LF transmission. During this time, 837 participants were enrolled to provide fingerstick blood samples to test for circulating filarial antigen (CFA) using the filariasis test strip. CFA positive individuals were asked to provide a second blood sample to test for microfilariae. Dried blood spots were also prepared for laboratory-based antibody testing. Data analysis is ongoing and results will be shared once finalized.

### Cambodia

The CL-SWASH (Community-led multi-sectorial plan to eliminate schistosomiasis and other parasitic and waterborne diseases) was implemented in six new schistosomiasis villages (four in Kratie province and two in Stung Treng province) in August 2020. The National Helminth Control Programme of the Ministry of Health coordinated the work, in collaboration with the Department of Rural Health of the Ministry of Rural Development, the Provincial Health Department, the Provincial Department of Rural Development, the Provincial Department of Education Youth and Sport, the District Office of Education Youth and Sport, the District Office of Rural Development, Health Centres, Operational Districts of Health and commune leaders.



CL-SWASH activities in schistosomiasis-endemic villages, Kratie and Stung Treng provinces, Cambodia, August 2021

Together with local health authorities (provincial, district and commune) and school teachers, the National Helminth Control Programme assessed the prevalence and intensity of soil-transmitted helminthiasis among school-aged children to monitor the impacts of semi-annual school deworming. The assessment was carried out in 12 primary schools of Siem Reap, Koh Kong, Kampong Speu, Prey Veng, Battambang and Kampong Thom provinces from August to September 2020.



Soil-transmitted helminth prevalence survey among school-aged children, Kampong Speu province, Cambodia, August-September 2020

The National Helminth Control Programme, together with local health authorities and with the support of the University of Ghent, Belgium, conducted a survey to assess the efficacy of albendazole (400 mg) against soil-transmitted helminthiasis in 914 school-aged children in Kampong Chhnang province in October 2020. Preserved stool samples were sent to the University of Ghent for further analysis to detect genetic markers related to anthelmintic resistance.



Survey on efficacy of albendazole among school-aged children in Kampong Chhnang province, Cambodia, October 2020

Together with local health authorities (provincial, district and commune), the National Helminth Control Programme conducted a survey, using Kato-Katz, to detect *Taenia* spp. in stool samples in five provinces (Kratie, Stung Treng, Rattanakiri, Mondulakiri and Preah Vihear). *Taenia* spp. were found in 4.2% of the 1 316 participants. The prevalence was the highest in Rattanakiri (10%) followed by Mondulakiri (9.3%).



*Taenia* spp. survey in five provinces of Cambodia, October 2020

The National Helminth Control Programme provided training on the Kato-Katz stool examination technique for 45 laboratory technicians from the referral and district hospitals of five provinces (Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Oddor Meanchey) from 18 to 19 November 2020.



Kato-Katz training for laboratory technicians at provincial and district referral

## Fiji

MDA against LF using triple drug therapy (IDA1) was completed in Serua (Talenaua) and Malolo Islands in November 2020. LF MDA training for Eastern Division was organized in December 2020. MDA using triple drug therapy in Eastern Division (IDA1) is expected to commence in February 2021.



MDA training in Lomaiviti, Eastern Division, Fiji, December 2020

A trachoma survey refresher course for trachoma graders, recorders and research teams was held on 10 – 11 December 2020. The actual survey was not done owing to two severe tropical cyclones that hit Fiji in December 2020 and January 2021. It is now rescheduled for completion by May 2021.

## French Polynesia

The Ministry of Health implemented the LF MDA campaign using DEC and albendazole between October 2020 and January 2021, targeting two remaining implementation units, namely Huahine (an island in the Leeward archipelago) and South Marquesas. Treatment coverages of 91% and 83% respectively were reported.

The protocol for management of patients with LF-associated morbidity was updated, with the introduction of ivermectin for individual case treatment.

## Kiribati

The island-wide targeted deworming campaign was carried out with support of WHO. Preschool-aged children, school-aged children and women of childbearing age were treated in March and September respectively. Coverage of 29.70% and 5.14% of the target populations was achieved in each round.

Implementation of the MDA campaign against trachoma continued between May and December 2020. Following the analysis of the 2019 impact assessment by WHO and Tropical Data, Kiribati will continue its second additional round of MDA in 2021.

## Lao People's Democratic Republic

A health education package on rabies prevention and control was developed to become part of the primary and secondary school teaching curriculum. Support was provided by WHO and the Global Alliance for Rabies Control. The package was finalised at the workshop on 14 and 15 July 2020, convened jointly by the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Training on the integrated curriculum used the curriculum first developed in September 2020 for school principals and teachers from 40 schools (20 primary and 20 secondary) in Xayabouly province, which records the most rabies cases. The integrated curriculum will be used in these schools in 2020-2021, and the outcomes will be evaluated in early 2021 before expansion to other provinces.



Poster and flip book produced in July-August 2020 on rabies prevention and control for use in primary and secondary school curricula in Lao PDR



Participants at the training session on the integrated school curriculum on rabies prevention and control, Xayabouly province, Lao PDR, September 2020

A World Rabies Day event to raise public awareness about rabies prevention and provide free dog vaccination was held in Vientiane Capital and Xayabouly province. The event was chaired by the Vice Minister of Health, Vice Minister of Agriculture, WHO Representative and FAO Representative in Lao PDR. It was held on 28 September 2020 in Vientiane Capital, and on 1 October 2020 in Xayabouly province.



Free dog vaccination, World Rabies Day, Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR 28 September 2020 (Credit: WHO)

The National Strategic Plan on Rabies Prevention and Control in Lao PDR, 2020-2024 was finalized and endorsed in October 2020 by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. The meeting to disseminate the strategic plan was held on 21 and 22 December 2020 in Vientiane. It was chaired by the Deputy Director of the Communicable Diseases Control Department and attended by the Director, Deputy Director and technical staff from the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Forestry, and Education and Sport.

The NTD Annual Partners Meeting was convened in Vientiane from 14 to 15 December 2020 to share progress, challenges and lessons learnt in controlling priority NTDs, namely soil-transmitted helminthiasis, schistosomiasis and opisthorchiasis. The meeting was chaired by the Vice Minister of Health, Vice Minister of Education and Sport, and the WHO Representative and attended by representatives from both ministries at national and provincial levels.



NTD Annual Partners Meeting, Vientiane, Lao PDR, 14 - 15 December 2020

The annual MDA against schistosomiasis was carried out in all schistosomiasis-endemic communities in Champasak province in October 2020. Stool examination was carried out at seven sentinel sites and 12 spot check sites in September 2020 to monitor the impacts of interventions on the prevalence and intensity of the disease.

### Malaysia

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, MDA using triple drug therapy for LF elimination was carried out in 20 hotspot localities in Sabah State (4 308 people) and 16 hotspot localities in Pahang State (2 528 people), and further hotspot localities in Perak State (1 862 people). The drug distribution modality was adapted to the new normal. Epidemiological coverage of above 90% of the eligible population was reported from all localities.



@MOH, Malaysia

LF MDA campaign with triple drug therapy, using preventive measures against COVID-19 in Sarawak State, Malaysia, December 2020

The LF transmission assessment survey (TAS) overcame significant challenges arising from continuing school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The LF team in Sabah organized home visits to conduct the survey, while in Sarawak students were gathered at the community hall, keeping social distance and ensuring preventive measures against COVID-19.



@MOH, Malaysia

LF TAS conducted at community halls owing to continuing school closures due to COVID-19 in Sarawak State, Malaysia, August 2020

## Papua New Guinea

The Papua New Guinea National Department of Health began the first LF transmission assessment survey in New Ireland Province in November 2020. A refresher training session on TAS for the national NTD team was held virtually on 28 October 2020. TAS training for the provincial team was held on 4 December, facilitated by NDOH, WHO and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), following which school-based TAS started. The survey was interrupted before the end of 2020 and was to be resumed in February 2021.



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LF TAS training for the provincial team, New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, 4 December 2020

## Philippines

The National Filariasis Elimination Program (NFEP) continued its campaign in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Department Circular for the Delivery of Routine Services under NFEP during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Department Memorandum Interim Guidelines on the Delivery of Routine LF MDA under NFEP during the COVID-19 Pandemic were both issued to ensure safe and effective delivery of routine services amid the pandemic. Accordingly, scheduled activities such as community-based TAS, special surveys and MDA campaigns were carried out by the Filariasis Program.



@DOH, Philippines

Kick-off ceremony at the Provincial Filaria MDA, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines 17 August 2020

The Provincial LF MDA kick-off ceremony was held on 17 August 2020, with the army's 7th Infantry division participating. The ceremony was initiated by the Sultan Kudarat Provincial Health Office in partnership with the Department of Health of Soccsksargen. The event aimed to publicise the most cost-effective way to control and eliminate LF and to raise awareness of the MDA that would be conducted throughout the province of Sultan Kudarat from August 17, 2020 to September 17, 2020. The ensuing province-wide MDA achieved 84.9% coverage.

The administrative order declaring November as Filariasis Mass Treatment Month was signed by the Secretary of Health in July 2020. In addition, an executive order was signed by the President of the Philippines in support of the administrative order, stipulating the different roles and responsibilities of government and attached agencies in the elimination campaign. Elimination strategies and activities were stepped up accordingly. The 2020 Filariasis Awareness Month theme was *Sa Panahon ng Pandemya at Krisis, Tuloy-tuloy ang Serbisyo Kontra Filariasis* which translates to "In Times of Pandemic and Crisis, Continuous Service Against Filariasis". Endemic provinces developed their own IEC materials using local dialects and emphasizing the importance of participating in MDA and LF surveys, using mosquito nets, wearing long sleeves and trousers in endemic areas, and timely consulting with doctors in the health centres. Radio interviews and the Facebook pages of the local health office also helped to bring focus to the month-long November events.



National and regional department of health: LF awareness campaign on Facebook, Philippines

DOH Memorandum 2020-0260 (Interim Guidelines on Integrated Helminth Control Program and Schistosomiasis Control and Elimination Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic) and DOH Circular 2020-0302 (Delivery of Routine Deworming Services under the Integrated Helminth Control Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic) laid out options on how to conduct routine deworming for the July 2020 Deworming Campaign, using a fixed-post approach (barangay health centres, barangay outposts, private clinics and churches) along with outreach or home visit approaches. These strategies were discussed virtually with the regional implementers and various programme stakeholders on 26 May 2020.



Virtual consultation on routine community deworming, Philippines, 26 May 2020

A two-day schistosomiasis multi-stakeholders virtual forum was held on 9-10 September 2020. The forum aimed to present, discuss and address ongoing issues and challenges, and identify current and future needs of the programme in achieving the target of transmission interruption by 2025. A total of 70 participants from national government agencies, non-government organizations, and academic institutions attended the forum along with international collaborators.

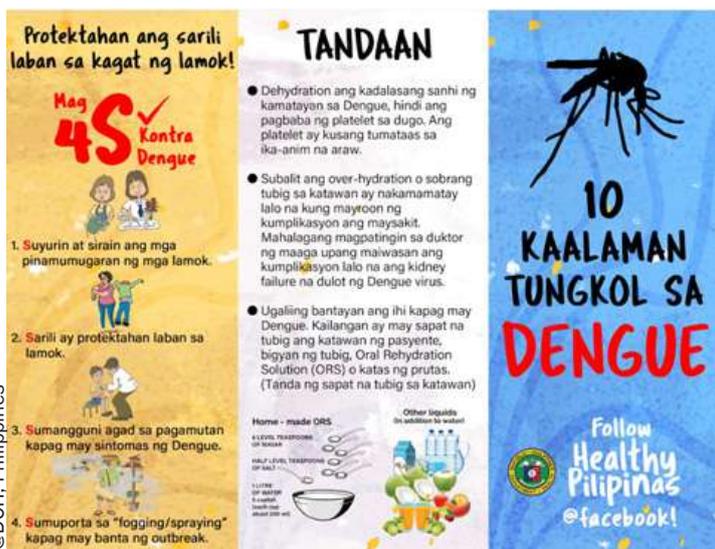


Schistosomiasis virtual forum, Philippines, 9-10 September 2020

In order to align with Philippine Republic Act No. 11223 – Universal Health Care Act, the National Dengue Prevention and Control Program expanded its scope to become the National Aedes-borne Viral Diseases Prevention and Control Program (NAVDPCCP) under Department Order No. 2020-0670, published on 9 November 2020, whereby the programme will address not only dengue but also chikungunya and Zika.

Despite dengue being treated as an endemic infectious disease year-round, precautionary measures are still needed to make sure there are no surges in cases during the rainy season, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. With this in mind, the Department of Health released Department Memorandum No. 2020-0357 on 18 August 2020 that spells out guidelines for dengue management such as (i) continuation of the advocacies and implementation of the Enhanced 4S strategies, (ii) intensification of vector surveillance activities, (iii) initiation of Integrated Vector Management; (iv) monitoring of possible cross-reactions between dengue and COVID-19 and (v) submission of reports to the NAVDPCCP.

The NAVDPCCP, working with WHO, held a series of meetings to develop rapid advice guidelines. With the assistance of the DOH-Health Promotion Bureau, the programme finalized and published Rapid Advice Guidelines aimed at community and barangay health workers, containing key messages and guidelines on what to do and what to look out for when it comes to dengue. The materials were disseminated digitally to the regional coordinators for reference and to be sent on to their respective local government units.



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Digital rapid advice guidelines for dengue prevention and control developed by the Department of Health in the Philippines

NAVDPCCP held a virtual programme implementation review with regional coordinators on 9 December 2020 to discuss the current status of the programme in relation to fund utilization, the implementation plan for the new policies, and activities planned for 2021.

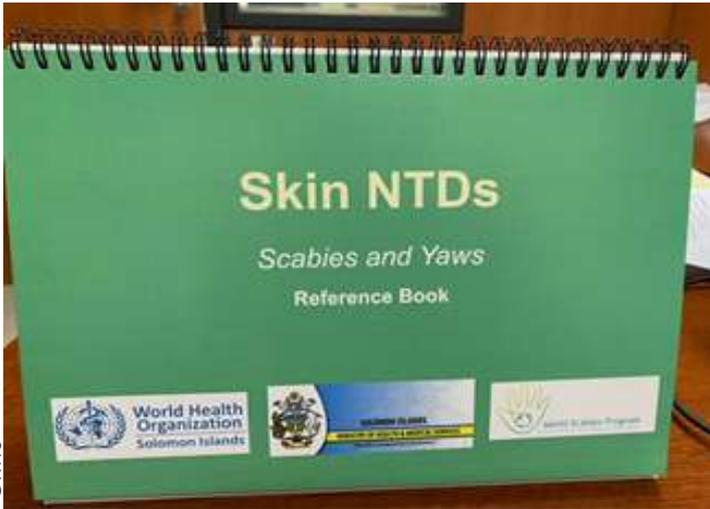


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National Aedes-borne Viral Diseases Prevention and Control Program, implementation review meeting, Philippines, 9 December 2020

### Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands Ministry of Health and Social Welfare organized a training session on 19 and 20 November for skin NTD trainers. The purpose was to strengthen primary health care capacity in the diagnosis, treatment and reporting of the skin NTDs, yaws and scabies. The training was attended by provincial NTD focal points from all ten provinces and facilitated by external partners and experts, including the World Scabies Program led by the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, and WHO. Training modules with job aids and flipbooks to assist primary health care workers were developed specifically for the Solomon Islands and printed for dissemination to all health facilities in the country.



Virtual training of skin NTD trainers, Solomon Islands, 19-20 November 2020 (left) and a Skin NTD flipbook for primary health care workers (right)

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and with support of WHO, set up a technical working group to lead the implementation of the school deworming programme in November 2020. A national training of trainers (TOT) for countrywide education authorities and school representatives is being planned, but as COVID-19 social distancing is still enforced in the country, it has been deferred.

## Tuvalu

Tuvalu planned to implement the second round of LF MDA using triple drug therapy in the fourth quarter of 2020. However, disruption of international flights to Tuvalu delayed the shipment of medicines and the MDA campaign is still pending.

## Vanuatu

The Ministry of Health held a provincial malaria and NTD training workshop in Torba province for provincial health officers and health care workers on 8-9 September 2020. The training covered global, regional and national updates, diagnosis, treatment, prevention and reporting on malaria and NTDs, and benefitted from WHO support. The national NTD programme team also met with staff from the provincial education office and livestock office to discuss working together to enhance health education on NTDs and malaria.

The Ministry of Health carried out the second round of school deworming and screening for yaws and scabies nationwide between July and December 2020. During this period, 349 suspected yaws case were identified, nine of which were confirmed as active yaws infection by DPP test. Eight were from Shefa province, and one from Tafea. Also 1 104 suspected cases of scabies were found, with the highest number reported in Tafea province, followed by Shefa and Senma provinces. A total of 30 761 children aged 1 to 15 years were dewormed against STH nationwide.

The Ministry of Health organized health education on NTDs and COVID-19 in five communities in Shefa and Sanma provinces from September to November 2020. This involved a 12-week programme with the community health workers explaining the transmission and prevention of NTDs and COVID-19, and reminding people of the importance of personal hygiene, particularly hand and face washing. They were also given deworming medicines, and screened for yaws and scabies. Each household actively participating received a donation of soap.



@Fasihah Taleo

Health education against NTDs and COVID-19, Sanma province (above) and Shefa province (below), Vanuatu.

## 2 REGIONAL NEWS

The Programme Managers Meeting to Accelerate Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases in the Western Pacific Region was held virtually from 1 to 4 September 2020. Almost 80 participants from 18 countries in the Western Pacific Region attended, along with eight temporary advisers, 28 observers and representatives, and 16 members of the World Health Organization (WHO) Secretariat. The meeting provided a venue to foster sharing of achievements, experience, common trends and challenges among NTD programme managers from health ministries, catalyse discussion to identify innovative practices and options to effectively engage multisectors, stakeholders and communities and enhance delivery of essential and comprehensive NTD interventions across countries and areas in the Region and leverage further innovation to enhance various programmatic components and strengthen whole-of-system multisectoral approach for accelerating control and elimination of NTDs in the Region.



@WHO

The Programme Managers Meeting to Accelerate Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases in the Western Pacific Region, virtual, 1 to 4 September 2020