



Ahead on malaria

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Ahead on malaria-Odisha shows the way in bringing down the incidence of new cases

- India has suffered from a major burden of malaria for decades, with high levels of morbidity and death.
- But the declining trend of the scourge shows that sustained public health action can achieve good results.
- The World Malaria Report 2018 of the World Health Organisation notes that India's record offers great promise in the quest to cut the number of new cases and deaths globally by at least 40% by 2020, and to end the epidemic by 2030.
- A lot of that optimism has to do with the progress made by Odisha, one of the most endemic States.
- Investments made there in recruiting accredited social health workers and large-scale distribution of insecticide-treated bednets, together with strategies to encourage health-seeking behaviour, seem to have paid off.
- The WHO report highlights a sharp drop in the number of cases in the State.
- This positive trend should encourage authorities not just in Odisha, but in the northeastern States and elsewhere too to cut the transmission of the disease further.
- Importantly, the reduction in the number of cases should not produce complacency and lead to a reduction in deployment of health workers and funding cuts to programme components.
- One issue that requires monitoring in India is resistance to combination therapy using artemisinin.
- Recent reports indicate that some patients in West Bengal became resistant to the treatment protocol used for the falciparum parasite, which causes debilitating cerebral malaria and leads to a high number of deaths.
- The phenomenon requires close monitoring — although the WHO said in a recent assessment that the treatment policy was changed to another

efficacious set of combination drugs in some northeastern States, after statistically significant treatment failure rates were found in 2012.

- Eliminating malaria requires an integrated approach, and this should involve Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal, which have a higher burden of the disease.
- There is a need for a coordinated approach to rid southern Asia of malaria.

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