

Ensuring Delivery of Malaria Control Services in Coronavirus Disease-2019-Affected Areas in the American Region

Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava, Prateek Saurabh Shrivastava¹

Member of the Medical Education Unit and Institute Research Council, Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth – Deemed to be University, ¹Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth – Deemed to be University, Ammapettai, Nellikuppam, Chengalpet, District, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the delivery of all the national health programs, including the efforts that have been taken for the prevention, control, and elimination of malaria. There are no doubts that the sudden upsurge in the number of COVID-19 cases has made the health authorities to focus their resources and time toward the effective containment of the infection. Thus, the need of the hour is to guide the health authorities toward the interventions, which need to be implemented to accomplish malaria elimination and at the same time safeguard the well-being of healthcare professionals. This can be accomplished by adapting the detection of malaria cases, simplifying malaria surveillance, and ensuring management of logistics. In conclusion, in the battle against COVID-19 infection, the routine services for malaria containment have been affected significantly. Thus, we have to take an evidence-based decision toward the continuation of the malaria services in the region, based on the transmission pattern of the disease.

Keywords: Coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic, malaria, World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the delivery of all the national health programs, including the efforts that have been taken for the prevention, control, and elimination of malaria.^[1] As of May 15, 2020, a total of 433,8658 cases and 297,119 deaths have been linked to the infection, with the American region being the most affected.^[2] In fact, the American region accounts for 186,4468 cases (42.9% of the global caseload) and 111,934 deaths (37.6% of the overall mortality), and the caseload is increasing with each day.^[2] Amid tackling the global emergency, it is extremely important to continue the efforts to prevent, detect, and treat malaria in the American region.^[3]

Impact of coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic on malaria services

There are no doubts that the sudden upsurge in the number of COVID-19 cases has made the health authorities to focus their resources and time toward the effective containment of the infection.^[1] Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that sustaining the gains against malaria by reinforcing the

health and surveillance mechanism will significantly aid in the better understanding of the novel viral infection. Thus, the need of the hour is to guide the health authorities toward the interventions, which need to be implemented to accomplish malaria elimination and at the same time safeguard the well-being of healthcare professionals. This can be accomplished by adapting the detection of malaria cases, simplifying malaria surveillance, and ensuring management of logistics (such as antimalarial drugs and insecticide-treated nets).^[1,3]

Areas to be strengthened

The policymakers have formulated a strategic action plan to guide actions at local and national levels to sustain the ongoing efforts.^[3]

Address for correspondence: Dr. Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava, Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth (SBV) – Deemed to be University, Tiruppur - Guduvancherry Main Road, Ammapettai, Nellikuppam, Chengalpet District - 603 108, Tamil Nadu, India.
E-mail: drshrishri2008@gmail.com

Submitted: 27-Apr-2020

Accepted: 17-May-2020

Published: 14-Dec-2020

Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:
www.medjbabylon.org

DOI:
10.4103/MJBL.MJBL_31_20

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as the author is credited and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

For reprints contact: WKHLRPMedknow_reprints@wolterskluwer.com

How to cite this article: Shrivastava SR, Shrivastava PS. Ensuring delivery of malaria control services in coronavirus disease-2019-affected areas in the American region. *Med J Babylon* 2020;17:371-2.

The first and foremost thing is to understand the various domains of malaria control, which have been affected due to the ongoing pandemic. This essentially includes the fact that the majority of the febrile patients are not approaching health centers, and the issue is coupled with the shortage of rapid diagnostic kits, and interruption of vector control activities. In addition, there has been a re-allocation of laboratory technicians for COVID-19 work, active surveillance for malaria is not functional as community workers are involved in COVID-19 activities, including contact tracing, and further shortage of chloroquine and artemisinin combination therapy has been reported.^[3,4]

After gaining the insights, we have to plan and take strategic actions at the national level by ensuring early diagnosis of malaria in individuals presenting with fever, especially in endemic regions.^[3] In addition, the process of purchase and distribution of antimalarials and other logistics needs to be expedited so that adequate stock is maintained in all the paces. Further, specific decisions need to be taken to ensure basic diagnostic, treatment, and preventive strategies, including the use of second-line drugs (in setting with shortage of first-line drugs). However, for getting better results, we have to adapt our mitigation actions at local level, including creating awareness about both the infectious diseases and the symptoms which warrant subjecting a patient to a diagnostic test. Further, we have to map the available human resources for the diagnosis of cases and estimate the amount of antimalarials in the area.^[1,3,4]

Implementing response based on the level of transmission of coronavirus disease-2019

It is important to ensure that those malaria-endemic areas, which have not reported any case of novel viral infection, should continue to deliver malaria services but take measures for increasing the awareness about both COVID-19 and malaria.^[3] Moreover, those areas which have reported imported

cases, should aim to optimize microscopy and management of patients of both the infectious diseases. Finally, in settings where community transmission has been reported, the malaria services should be restricted to only early detection and treatment.^[3,5] However, regardless of the settings, it is extremely crucial to ensure safety of the healthcare professionals through the use of personal protective measures and adherence to the infection prevention and control measures.^[3]

CONCLUSION

In the battle against COVID-19 infection, the routine services for malaria containment have been affected significantly. Thus, we have to take an evidence-based decision toward the continuation of the malaria services in the region based on the transmission pattern of the disease.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Thornton J. COVID-19: Keep essential malaria services going during pandemic, urges WHO. *BMJ* 2020;369:M1637.
2. World Health Organization. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report 116; 2020. Available from: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200515-covid-19-sitrep-116.pdf?sfvrsn=8dd60956_2. [Last accessed on 2020 May 16].
3. Pan American Health Organization. Measures to Ensure the Continuity of the Response to Malaria in the Americas During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Washington: WHO press; 2020. p. 1-15.
4. Tanne JH. COVID-19: Cases grow in US as Trump pushes promise of a malaria drug. *BMJ* 2020;368:M1155.
5. Wang J, Xu C, Wong YK, He Y, Adegnika AA, Kremsner PG, *et al*. Preparedness is essential for malaria-endemic regions during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Lancet* 2020;395:1094-6.