MILESTONE: COVID-19 FIVE YEARS AGO

30 December 2024 - Five years ago on 31 December 2019, WHO's Country Office in China picked up a media statement by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission from their website on cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, China. In the weeks, months and years that unfolded after that, COVID-19 came to shape our lives and our world.

At WHO, we went to work immediately as the new year dawned. WHO employees activated emergency systems on 1 January 2020, and informed the world on 4 January. By 9-12 January, WHO had published its first set of comprehensive guidance for countries, and on 13 January, we brought together partners to publish the blueprint of the first SARS-CoV-2 laboratory test.

All along, we convened experts and ministries of health from around the world, gathered and analysed data, and shared what was reported, what we learned and what it meant for people. Read about WHO's actions in this interactive timeline.

As we mark this milestone, let's take a moment to honour the lives changed and lost, recognize those who are suffering from COVID-19 and long COVID, express gratitude to the health workers who sacrificed so much to care for us, and commit to learning from COVID-19 to build a healthier tomorrow.

We continue to call on China to share data and access so we can understand the origins of COVID-19. This is a moral and scientific imperative. Without transparency, sharing, and cooperation among countries, the world cannot adequately prevent and prepare for future epidemics and pandemics.

As we pose the question, "Is the world better prepared for the next pandemic than we were for COVID-19?" see WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus's response at a recent press conference: https://who.canto.global/b/SHEJL

Available from: https://www.who.int/news/item/30-12-2024-milestone-covid-19-five-years-ago

WHO PREQUALIFIES DIAGNOSTIC TEST TO SUPPORT SAFER ADMINISTRATION OF P. VIVAX MALARIA TREATMENTS

8 January 2025 - the World Health Organization (WHO) prequalified the first diagnostic test for glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) deficiency which can help to safely deliver WHO-recommended treatments to prevent relapse of Plasmodium vivax (P. vivax) infection.

The prequalification of this G6PD diagnostic test marks a significant milestone in facilitating safe and effective P. vivax malaria treatment, reaffirming WHO's dedication to ensuring equitable access to life-saving health solutions

globally. Some 500 000 people die each year from malaria, most of them children.

The prequalification of this test immediately followed the prequalification, in early December, of two new tafenoquine products for anti-relapse treatment of P. vivax malaria, and these therapeutics were recommended in updated WHO malaria guidelines released a few days earlier, in late November.

This package of actions by WHO reflects the organization's recent adoption of synchronized and parallel processes for two key functions: developing recommendations for essential health products and overseeing their prequalification.

While these processes remain entirely independent, their alignment aims to significantly reduce the time required to bring vital health products to low- and lower-middle-income countries. This streamlined approach underscores WHO's commitment to improving global health equity by expediting access to life-saving products.

P. vivax malaria is endemic in all WHO Regions except the European Region, with an estimated 9.2 million clinical cases occurring in 2023. P. vivax is the dominant malaria parasite in most countries outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

G6PD deficiency, a genetic condition, affects more than 500 million people. While most people are unaware of their G6PD deficiency and go through life without suffering ill effects, certain drugs administered to prevent malaria relapse caused by P. vivax can result in acute haemolysis (destruction of red blood cells). Without accessible and reliable G6PD testing, it has been challenging to safely provide anti-relapse treatments, limiting the widespread use of this effective therapy.

"The prequalification of this G6PD enzyme test for patients with P. vivax malaria can help countries in enhancing access to much-needed quality-assured tests, enabling safe and effective treatment and prevention of this type of relapsing malaria," said Dr Yukiko Nakatani, WHO Assistant Director-General for Access to Medicines and Health Products. "Currently, no other prequalification applications are received for this type of tests. We encourage the submission of additional products to expand the range of effective diagnostic tools available to countries in need."

"Wider availability of the test can help strengthen the global malaria response by reducing the number of P. vivax infections due to relapse and in turn reduce onward transmission," said Dr Daniel Ngamije Madandi, Director of WHO's Global Malaria Programme.

Testing devices that can accurately distinguish patients with G6PD activity levels above and below the normal levels provide critical information to clinicians to decide which of P. vivax anti-relapse treatment regimens is most appropriate, including low- and high-dose primaquine and single-dose tafenoquine.

The STANDARD G6PD System diagnostic tool manufactured by SD Biosensor, Inc., is a semi-quantitative, near-patient solution designed for the measurement of G6PD enzyme activity in capillary or venous whole blood. The device is intended for use in both laboratory and non-laboratory settings and operates with the STANDARD G6PD Analyzer, a hand-held device, delivering results in a few minutes.

Available from: https://www.who.int/news/item/08-01-2025-who-prequalifies-diagnostic-test-to-support-safer-administration-of-p.-vivax-malaria-treatments