



BURDEN OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN ASIA

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Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of approximately 20 communicable diseases that impact over a billion people in tropical and subtropical nations. These diseases include bacterial, fungal, viral, and parasitic infections. These illnesses primarily affect low-income, marginalized people who lack access to sanitary facilities, safe drinking water, and medical care. The majority of these illnesses are controllable and avoidable, but leading to high rates of premature death, they cause high rates of morbidity, severe disfigurement, disability, and chronic illness. By preventing people from regular working or going to school, these NTDs cause stigma and social exclusion, which prolongs poverty and worsen the health conditions.

The highest TB burden area is the Asian continent, 60% of the global lymphatic filariasis burden area, and a majority of the leprosy cases worldwide, while Southeast Asia has the second-highest malaria incidence for any WHO region. In 2020, there was a global increase in malaria deaths, and disruptions in health services in Southeast Asia had a major impact. There was a high burden of TB, with over a quarter of the global burden (2.71 million cases in India, and substantial numbers in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand). In 2024, there was a major increase in vaccine-preventable disease and tropical infections. Although public health successes have been achieved in high-income regions, infectious diseases remain a primary cause of morbidity and mortality in low- and middle-income countries, such as south East Asia, where it has the third-largest HIV epidemic in the world. However, communicable diseases continue to be a major cases and South-East Asia continues to carry a substantial proportion of the global burden.

Ecological, agricultural, and demographic changes that facilitate pathogen spillover and are leading to emerging infectious diseases. Often, the pathogen comes from a reservoir in zoonoses. Animal health is completely neglected and not integrated with human health. Outbreak preparedness is hindered throughout Southeast Asia due to limited available resources, poor laboratory facilities, and weak surveillance. In addition, the frequencies and severities of NTDs are exacerbated by global climate change conditions. Unevenly distributed with considerable impact on health and overall burden due to lack of resources and disaster handling. Unregulated availability of antibiotics, irrational use and the weak health system contribute to the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in the region.

WHO states that “The road map establishes global targets and milestones to prevent, control, eliminate, or eradicate 20 diseases and disease groups, and cross-cutting targets that align with the Sustainable Development Goals. These three pillars will underpin global efforts to achieve the targets: accelerate programmatic action (pillar 1), intensify cross-cutting approaches (pillar 2), and change operating models and culture to facilitate country ownership (pillar 3)”.

FURTHER READING

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