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OCEANIA/PAPUA NEW GUINEA - Warning and prevention of a malaria epidemic: long-term insecticide-treated nets have been distributed

Port Moresby (Agenzia Fides) - Approximately 90% of the population of Papua New Guinea is at risk of malaria. This island country, located south of the equator, 1.9 million cases are registered every year. Thanks to the many initiatives to prevent the proliferation of the disease and to reduce the number of infections, long-term insecticide-treated mosquito nets have been distributed in every district. In Papua New Guinea, prevention is crucial, since it represents 36% of all confirmed cases in the Western Pacific region. Mosquitoes quickly adapt to human migration and higher temperatures, and the disease tends to spread every time the weather changes. The Scientific Program on Climate Change in the Pacific shows that the maximum temperatures in Port Moresby has increased by 0.11 degrees every 10 years since 1950, and may even increase between 0.4 and one degree by 2030. The prediction is that about 200 000 people living in higher regions will be infected. Meanwhile, the National Program for Malaria Control, the Population Services International, the OilSearch Health Foundation and the Institute of Medical Research, are trying new strategies for vector control. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), half the world population is subject to malaria, and pregnant women, children and HIV positive are particularly vulnerable. In 2010 the reported cases were 216 million with 655 000 deaths worldwide, a decrease of 25% compared to 2000. In Papua New Guinea, the world's first test of mosquito nets treated with insecticide in 1986 led to a national distribution program in 1989 which recorded a decrease of clinical cases in health centers. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 03/08/2012)

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