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EAST TIMOR

SUCCESS STORY

Fighting Malaria with Bed Nets

Insecticide-treated nets are key to the country's anti-malaria strategy



Photo: TAIS/Arturo Sanabria

East Timor President Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, left, receives a soccer ball with an anti-malaria message from U.S. Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees during an event to celebrate the anti-malaria program's launch in Bucoli, near Baucau, on December 1, 2005.

"These mosquito nets are especially important for children under five and pregnant mothers," East Timor President Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão told residents receiving long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets.

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Nearly 200,000 children were infected with malaria in East Timor in 2004. The annual death toll of confirmed malaria cases is about 150, but the number of undiagnosed cases is likely to be much higher. One of the most effective ways to prevent malaria infection is to sleep under long-lasting, insecticide-treated bed nets. Approved by the World Health Organization for their efficacy and safety, the nets are proven to significantly reduce the number of malaria deaths in children. They are especially effective because the insecticide can repel and kill mosquitoes for up to five years.

USAID is participating in an effort to distribute more than 80,000 insecticide-treated mosquito nets to the six districts in East Timor hit hardest by malaria. In these districts, every single family with a child under age five will receive a special mosquito net to reduce the risk of infection. Families receiving nets learn about the dangers of mosquito-borne disease and the importance of using the nets effectively.

"These mosquito nets are especially important for children under five and pregnant mothers," East Timor President Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão told families during a ceremony marking the program's launch. "The nets are yours now, so please ensure that you use them properly. Let's all work together to combat malaria."

Through the USAID program, local officials, community leaders, and families with young children are learning about the dangers of mosquito bites, detecting signs of malaria in children, the need to seek treatment promptly, the importance of the nets, and hanging and washing techniques that will keep the nets effective. Local elected leaders are helping health staff and volunteers with health promotion and malaria prevention efforts. The districts targeted in this project are Baucau, Viqueque, Lautem, Aileu, Dili, and Oecussi.

The anti-malaria programs are integral to USAID's strategic objective to help East Timor improve the health of its people and reduce mortality among women and children.