

Malaria prevention during the challenging times of COVID-19

Health fears related to the COVID-19 pandemic, financial pressures and restricted access to health facilities are resulting in fewer people following malaria prevention activities and seeking malaria treatment during lockdown.

Village Health Team members (VHTs) and Key Influencers in Uganda can play an essential role at this time, as they are a major source of health information. They are well known and trusted in their communities, and may be given access where others might not.

With training and tools, Key Influencers can carry out activities that are designed to encourage positive behavior change, such as regular use of long-lasting insecticidal nets and improved health seeking, keeping communities on track during these challenging times.



Kiribwa Ronald, a Key Influencer from Kalangala district, conducting a health education session

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many communities globally and in Uganda to a magnitude no one expected. Services that people rely on for healthy and productive lives, especially health services, continue to be adversely affected.

In an effort to control the spread of the virus, the President of Uganda (H.E President Yoweri Museveni), issued several measures on 25th March 2020 that eventually led to a countrywide lockdown. Some of the directives included: closure of airports,

border points, school closure, and a ban on public and private transport.

The ban on public transport has especially affected communities which are far from public health facilities. The only way people can travel to a health center during the lockdown is to get clearance from the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) who is stationed at district level.

The process of getting travel permission is not easy and has led to people self-medicating and only trying to seek health services when they are already very ill.

USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts (MAPD) has trained and equipped 159 Key Influencers who continue to carry out a range of interpersonal activities to encourage significant and sustained positive change in the health practices of their communities.

During these challenging times, Kiribwa Ronald a Key Influencer and VHT from Kalangala district, is continuing to deliver malaria prevention, testing and treatment services to communities. Ronald is one of the 65 Key Influencers in Masaka region who have been oriented and supported by MAPD project to conduct community dialogues, make home visits and provide health education talks on malaria prevention and control.

Ronald receives a phone call from a mother with an ill child and without hesitation he prepares his medicine box and jumps onto his motorbike to visit her. He has pledged to continue the fight against malaria by travelling to households to conduct testing and treatment of malaria for children under five years old.

After testing and treating the children, he reminds the household members to continue using mosquito nets and clear breeding sites around the household. With the knowledge and job aids acquired from MAPD he confidently provides a session on the dangers and signs of malaria, emphasizing prevention measures.

During March and April 2020, he has tested 45 children, 13 of these were positive, and all were successfully treated.

QUOTE

"People in my community are aware of Malaria prevention due to the health education sessions we have conducted. In this COVID-19 era they call me for support in case of any sign and symptom of malaria in their children."

**Kiribwa Ronald, Key Influencer,
Kalangala district**

NEXT STEPS

Ronald has now started to persuade other VHTs and Key Influencers to embrace the idea because it has worked so well in his community. Since malaria does not respect the lockdown it is important to continue to support communities to tackle the disease.



Kiribwa Ronald conducts a malaria test for a child

This success story is published as part of a series from the USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts project. For more information, see www.malariaconsortium.org/resources/publications/977/ or contact: Dr Sam Gudozi, s.gudozi@malariaconsortium.org

USAID's Malaria Action Program for Districts aims to improve the health status of the Ugandan population by reducing childhood and maternal morbidity and mortality due to malaria. The project will support the Government of Uganda for a period of five years, focusing in particular on children under five years of age and pregnant women.

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