

20th May 2010, Jakarta - Health authorities are successfully battling malaria in remote eastern Indonesia by linking efforts to fight the mosquito-borne disease to maternal and child healthcare

"Pregnant women and children are especially vulnerable to malaria, and modern malaria diagnosis and prevention can be delivered via existing maternal health and immunisation services in a symbiotic way," said William Hawley, a malaria expert with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Nurses and midwives help the malaria programme with diagnosis, treatment and bed net distribution, Hawley said. Furthermore, because people want bed nets, more women use antenatal care and bring their children to be immunised.

"The malaria programme, the antenatal care programme, and the expanded programme on immunisation all benefit, but most important - women and kids benefit," Hawley said.

Malaria was once the top health problem in South Halmahera District - 400 islets inhabited by 200,000 people in North Maluku Province, health officials say.

Swamps, poor sanitation, poverty and low levels of immunisation left the population - pregnant women and children in particular - vulnerable to health problems.

By integrating prevention, diagnosis and treatment with antenatal care and child immunisation, the number of malaria deaths in South Halmahera plummeted from 226 in 2003 to four in 2008, and the incidence of malaria dropped by 50 percent, according to the district health office.

Source: [IRIN](#)