

NTDs burden in Latin America and the Caribbean may exceed that of HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria

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According to a new analysis published September 24th in the open-access journal *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, "The Neglected Tropical Diseases of Latin America and the Caribbean: A Review of Disease Burden and Distribution and a Roadmap for Control And Elimination," neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) as a group may have surpassed HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria as the most prevalent infectious diseases in Latin America and the Caribbean. The analysis found that NTDs are the most common infections of approximately 200 million of the poorest people in the region. They include tens of millions of cases of intestinal worm infections, and almost 10 million cases of Chagas disease, as well as schistosomiasis, trachoma, dengue fever, leishmaniasis, lymphatic filariasis (LF), and onchocerciasis.

NTDs produce extreme poverty by adversely impacting child development, pregnancy outcomes and worker productivity. In some cases in Latin America and the Caribbean, NTDs also represent a living legacy of slavery, because they were first introduced into the region through the global slave trade, and even today they predominantly affect people of African descent and indigenous groups, as well as other vulnerable groups such as women and children.

"Our findings indicate that the combined disease burden of NTDs in Latin America and Caribbean appears to exceed that of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, or malaria. Yet, we have the proven effective, low cost

tools at our fingertips to eliminate at least three of this devastating diseases," said one of the authors of the analysis Dr. Peter Hotez, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.A.P., President of the Sabin Vaccine Institute, Walter G. Ross Professor and Chair of Microbiology, Immunology, and Tropical Medicine at George Washington University and co-author of the analysis. "It's time to invest in this region and end the needless suffering."

The analysis states that in the coming years, schistosomiasis transmission could be eliminated in the Caribbean, and that transmission of lymphatic filariasis and onchocerciasis could be eliminated in Latin America and the Caribbean with proven successful, cost effective and low-cost treatments. The most burdensome NTDs, such as Chagas disease, intestinal worm infections, and schistosomiasis may first require scale-up of existing resources and/or the development of new tools in order to achieve wider control and/or elimination. Ultimately, successful wide-scale efforts for NTD elimination will require an inter-sectoral approach that bridges public health with social services and environmental interventions.

"Neglected diseases impose a huge burden on developing countries, constituting a serious obstacle for socioeconomic development and quality of life. They mostly affect people living either in shantytowns, indigenous communities or poor rural and agricultural areas," said one of the authors of the analysis Dr. Mirta Roses, Director of Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

On Friday, September 26 during the closing session of the Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting, Dr. Hotez will discuss this new analysis as well as recent news from the NTD community: on Monday, UK government officials announced that they will be contributing £50 million over the next five years toward the control and elimination of NTDs, including Guinea worm. In addition, the World Health

Organziation announced that in 2007 alone, 546 million of the world's poorest people received treatment for lymphatic filariasis at a cost of 10 cents per person, enabling them to live healthier more productive lives.

Throughout the CGI Annual Meeting this week, the Global Network will also call upon CGI participants to invest in efforts to help the people of Haiti who were devastated by Hurricane Ike by combating NTDs like lymphatic filariasis and soil-transmitted intestinal worms that are widespread in the country. After rainfall-induced disasters like Hurricane Ike, respiratory and intestinal infections usually increase and there is increased risk of breeding of the mosquito that transmits lymphatic filarisis in Haiti. While around three million people will be treated in Haiti in 2008 for lymphatic filariasis, additional resources are needed to step up and maintain treatment coverage in Haiti with its population of 9.5 million people, particularly in the wake of the Hurricane.

Citation: Hotez PJ, Bottazzi ME, Franco-Paredes C, Ault SK, Periago MR (2008) The Neglected Tropical Diseases of Latin America and the Caribbean: A Review of Disease Burden and Distribution and a Roadmap for Control and Elimination. PLoS Negl Trop Dis 2(9): e300. doi:10.1371/journal.pntd.0000300
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