

should be more active in promoting DDT for IRS rather than relying on insecticide-treated bed nets alone as a preventative tool.

However, Dr Kabir Cham, Senior Adviser with WHO's Malaria Policy and Strategy Team, said that insecticide-treated bed nets and IRS each have their specific roles in malaria control. "DDT is one of 12 insecticides approved by WHO for IRS, and like all of them it has certain advantages and disadvantages, which should be analysed in the local context to make the best choice," said Cham.

In 1935 DDT was discovered to be a highly effective insecticide which led to its widespread use as a general pesticide in agriculture. Its use for disease control began during the Second World War and became the main product used in global efforts, supported by WHO, to eradicate malaria in the 1950s and 1960s. According to WHO's booklet, "Frequently asked questions on DDT use for disease vector control," this campaign resulted in a significant reduction in malaria transmission in many parts of the world and was probably instrumental in eradicating the disease from Europe and North America.

However, following widespread concern over the environmental and health risks posed by the chemical's persistence in the environment long after its initial application, DDT was banned in the US in 1972 and later in other countries. According to WHO, although there is no direct link between DDT and any negative human health effect, there is growing evidence that it may disrupt reproductive and endocrine function.

The WHO booklet "Frequently Asked questions on DDT use for disease vector control," is available at: <http://mosquito.who.int/docs/FAQonDDT.pdf> ■

Clare Kapp, *Johannesburg*

## In brief

### Young motherhood biggest killer of girls in developing world

Pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death among girls and young women aged 15 to 19 in the developing world, according to a new

report released by the US-based non-profit organization, Save the Children.

The *State of the World's Mothers 2004*, released on 4 May, argues that providing girls with better educational opportunities and access to improved health care is key to preventing pregnancy in teenage women.

"For too many young girls around the world, motherhood is a disabling tragedy, or worse yet, a death sentence," said Mary Beth Powers, the group's reproductive health adviser.

Around 70 000 teenagers die annually because of complications from pregnancy and childbirth, according to Powers. The girls who do survive often struggle to overcome poor health, education and poverty, she added.

The prospects for the children of these young mothers are little better. According to the report, the offspring of teenaged mothers are 50% more likely to die than those born to older women. An estimated 1 million infants born to teenaged mothers die before their first birthday.

The report is available at: [http://www.savethechildren.org/mothers/report\\_2004/index.asp](http://www.savethechildren.org/mothers/report_2004/index.asp) ■

### "Kill or Cure?": BBC broadcasts series on developing-country diseases

"Malaria" was the first subject of a new BBC television documentary series about the diseases which take a heavy toll on populations in developing countries but have been traditionally neglected by the pharmaceutical industry because of lack of profit potential. The first programme in the series was aired worldwide on 14 May on BBC World — a network with an audience reach of approximately 250 million viewers.

The programme on "Malaria" is to be followed by "Kalar Azar" (leishmaniasis) from 21 May, "Lymphatic Filariasis," from 28 May, "TB" (tuberculosis) from 4 June, "Hep B," from 11 June, "Diarhoea" from 18 June, "Bilharzia" from 25 June and "Polio" from 2 July.

"For too long these diseases have been ignored," says Professor David Molyneux of the Liverpool School of Tropical Hygiene. "The BBC is to be praised for running a series that vividly portrays the reality of life for tens of millions of people around the world."

### Malaria — time to ACT

Lack of funding, political will and long lead times were cited as some of the major barriers to the implementation of artemisinin combination therapy (ACT) for malaria treatment during an international conference, held at Columbia University, US, 29–30 April.

The International Symposium on Malaria, cosponsored by WHO, UNICEF, Médecins Sans Frontières and Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, brought together technical experts, policy-makers, economists, service providers, pharmaceutical and diagnostics manufacturers, and donors to find ways to overcome remaining barriers to the implementation of ACT for effective malaria treatment.

"Urgent solutions need to be found to support changes in national protocols in endemic countries, to fund effective treatment and to ramp up the production of ACTs," said meeting organizers in a joint statement.

The call to action follows the increasing resistance exhibited by malarial parasites to conventional antimalarial drugs. Despite evidence which suggests that drugs derived from *Artemisia* plants hold enormous potential for combating the global malaria epidemic, progress in getting these new drugs to patients has been slow. (See related article, "WHO refutes malaria malpractice allegations": *Bulletin* 2004;82:237.) ■

### India bans smoking

India, home to 250 million smokers, has banned smoking in public places as well as the advertising of all tobacco products and the sale of tobacco to minors.

Like Ireland's recent ban, its Indian counterpart, instituted on 1 May, applies to enclosed areas such as restaurants, offices, airports and buses. India, the world's second largest tobacco consumer after China, accounted for one-fifth of the 4 million deaths resulting from tobacco-related illnesses in 2000. ■