



7 April 2014 – Mosquitoes, flies, and ticks have always been bothersome. But their bite carries more than the threat of an itch.

Today, [World Health Day](#), turns its focus to [vector-borne diseases](#). These include diseases such as malaria, dengue and yellow fever. They cause chronic suffering, serious illness and death. Traveling in innocuous little creatures, which many view as simple pests, these illnesses are spreading.

Over half of the world's population is at risk of contracting these diseases. Travel, trade and migration carry them beyond any national border. Despite being preventable, these infections still have a heavy toll on some of the world's poorest populations. Every year over a million people die from vector-borne diseases.

These bugs carry a threat beyond a simple health risk. The science to treat and prevent the spread of these illnesses exists. Simple measures such as wearing long sleeve shirts, using repellent and clearing stagnant water can do much to prevent them. This must be taken into account in international development initiatives such as urban development and irrigation.

Poorly planned execution of these initiatives can cause extreme health risks for the societies they are trying to help. By effectively planning and executing vector control strategies the social and economic gains can be substantial. As we work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and define a post-2015 development agenda, recognizing that investing in vector control and disease prevention is a wise and necessary choice.

Be Safe

The UN has taken action in areas with a significant danger of vector-borne diseases. In Africa, for example, more than 700 million insecticide-treated bed nets have already helped to cut malaria rates dramatically, particularly among children and pregnant women.

Protecting yourself and your family is straightforward. Wearing long pants and shirts, avoiding keeping stagnant water, using bed nets and repellents, using window screens, and getting proper vaccinations are all important, yet simple, steps you can take to be safe.

“On this World Health Day, I urge countries and development partners to make vector control a priority. Let us work together to tackle this serious but eminently preventable threat to human health and development”, said Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in his [statement](#) on this day.