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Human African trypanosomiasis: number of new cases drops to historically low level in 50 years

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The number of new cases of human African trypanosomiasis (also known as sleeping sickness) reported to WHO has dropped below 10 000 for the first time in 50 years.

In 2009, there were 9877 reported cases of the disease compared with more than 17 600 in 2004 and almost 38 000 in 1998.

Strengthened control and surveillance efforts by national sleeping sickness programmes in endemic countries over the past 10 years have rekindled hopes of eliminating the disease as a public health problem in 36 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.



Mobile medical team accessing a remote village on foot in the Republic of the Congo.

" ... This is the first time in decades that we are below the symbolic number of 10 000 new cases per year ... "

" ... It is a brilliant demonstration of what can be done with determined and clear day-to-day control efforts, particularly in the absence of new tools."

Dr Hiroki Nakatani, WHO's Assistant Director-General for HIV/AIDS, TB, Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases

Collaboration between WHO and two of its regional offices – the Regional Office for Africa and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean – has contributed to reducing transmission of the disease. This reduction has been made possible through the support of endemic countries, and improved surveillance and case reporting. A partnership between WHO and Sanofi-aventis has enabled the systematic screening and treatment of affected populations.

"To be able to achieve elimination, we need to be able to modify control strategies and sustain heightened surveillance in all endemic countries," added Dr Lorenzo Savioli, the Director of WHO's Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases. "This implies the availability of new diagnostic tools and the use of safer and easily administered drugs."

Bilateral cooperation and support from nongovernmental organizations as well as a drug donation from Bayer Healthcare have also helped to reduce transmission levels in endemic countries.

Human African trypanosomiasis is a parasitic disease transmitted by the bite of an infected Glossina insect, commonly known as the tsetse fly. The disease affects mostly poor populations living in remote rural areas of Africa.

Left untreated, human African trypanosomiasis is usually fatal.

Video: "[Survival — The Deadliest Disease](#)", BBC World News, 2008.

If you need more information please visit the NTD web site on human African trypanosomiasis: [human African trypanosomiasis website](#)



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