

Vector-Borne Diseases: A growing global health concern.

Karen Kevan*

Postgraduate Institute of Ecology A.C., Xalapa, Mexico

Introduction

Vector-borne diseases, transmitted by organisms such as mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas, are a significant cause of illness and death worldwide. These diseases account for a large portion of global infectious disease burden, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions [1]. The vectors themselves—arthropods like mosquitoes, ticks, sand-flies, and tsetse flies—carry pathogens (bacteria, viruses, or parasites) from one host to another, spreading infections that can cause severe morbidity and even mortality. Climate change, urbanization, and globalization have exacerbated the spread of these diseases, making them a growing concern for public health systems globally [2].

Vector-borne diseases can be caused by different types of pathogens—viruses, bacteria, or parasites—each transmitted by specific vectors. Below, we review some of the most common and significant vector-borne diseases [3].

Malaria is one of the most well-known and deadly vector-borne diseases. It is caused by Plasmodium parasites, which are transmitted to humans through the bite of infected Anopheles mosquitoes. Malaria causes symptoms such as fever, chills, fatigue, and can lead to serious complications such as organ failure or death, particularly in young children, pregnant women, and immunocompromised individuals [4]. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there were 229 million cases of malaria worldwide in 2019, with the majority occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. Efforts to control malaria focus on insecticide-treated bed nets, indoor residual spraying, antimalarial drugs, and vaccine development. The RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine, for example, has shown some promise in reducing malaria incidence in children [5].

Dengue fever is caused by the dengue virus, which is transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes, particularly Aedes aegypti. The disease is characterized by high fever, severe headache, joint pain, rash, and mild bleeding [6]. In some cases, it progresses to dengue hemorrhagic fever or dengue shock syndrome, which can be fatal. Dengue is prevalent in tropical and subtropical regions of the world, with an estimated 100-400 million infections occurring annually, according to the WHO [7]. The main strategy for preventing dengue involves controlling mosquito populations through vector control programs and mosquito-breeding site management. There is also a dengue vaccine (Dengvaxia), although its use is

recommended only in areas where dengue is endemic and for individuals who have had prior dengue infection [8].

Several factors contribute to the increasing burden of vector-borne diseases globally. Changes in climate, particularly rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns, can expand the geographic range of many vectors. Mosquitoes like Aedes aegypti, responsible for transmitting dengue, Zika, and chikungunya, thrive in warm, humid environments. As global temperatures rise, these mosquitoes are expanding into new regions, increasing the risk of outbreaks [9]. Rapid urbanization, especially in tropical and subtropical regions, creates ideal conditions for vectors like mosquitoes to breed. Poor sanitation, lack of waste management, and the proliferation of stagnant water sources in urban areas provide abundant breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Additionally, dense human populations facilitate the rapid spread of vector-borne diseases. Increased global travel and trade allow vectors and the pathogens they carry to spread more quickly. Travelers may inadvertently transport infected vectors or pathogens to areas where they were previously absent, leading to the introduction of diseases in regions with no prior immunity. The widespread use of insecticides to control vector populations has led to the development of resistance in many species. Insects like mosquitoes have developed resistance to commonly used insecticides, such as pyrethroids, making vector control programs less effective [10].

Conclusion

Vector-borne diseases represent a significant global health challenge, affecting millions of people each year and causing widespread morbidity and mortality. While substantial progress has been made in controlling some diseases, new threats are emerging, exacerbated by climate change, urbanization, and resistance to control measures. Addressing the growing burden of vector-borne diseases requires a multi-pronged approach, including effective vector control, vaccination, early diagnosis, and improved public health infrastructure. Continued research into new treatments, vaccines, and innovative vector control strategies will be essential in combating the spread of these diseases. A global collaborative effort, including increased investment in public health, infrastructure, and education, is needed to prevent the spread of vector-borne diseases and reduce their impact on vulnerable populations worldwide.

*Correspondence to: Karen Kevan, Postgraduate Institute of Ecology A.C., Xalapa, Mexico, E-mail: karen.kev@posgrado.edu.mx

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