

Mumbai dabbawalas join hands for the World Health Day campaign, 'small bite: big threat'

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Addressing the growing threat of 'vector-borne diseases', the theme of World Health Day (WHD) 2014, the World Health Organization Country Office for India, jointly with the Health Department of Maharashtra and the Nutan Mumbai Tiffin Box Suppliers Charity Trust today called for greater and focused attention to prevention and control of vector-borne diseases in India - dengue, malaria, chikungunya, lymphatic filariasis, kala-azar (also known as visceral leishmaniasis) and Japanese encephalitis.

The World Health Day campaign, 'small bite: big threat' is aimed at raising awareness about the threats posed by insect vectors and the bacteria, viruses, and parasites they carry, collectively known as vector-borne diseases (VBDs); and to motivate families and communities to protect themselves through simple measures.

An important activity to commemorate the WHD 2014 is an awareness programme with the Mumbai dabbawalas to reach Mumbaikars with key messages about preventing and controlling vector-borne diseases, especially malaria and dengue. On 7 April 2014, the dabbawalas will deliver along with lunch boxes, a specially created tag with key messages.

Dr Nata Menabde, WHO representative to India highlighted, "In India, the burden and risk of vector-borne diseases is massive. The burden is concentrated in the remote areas of the country with the poorest health systems where the population is most exposed. Weak collaboration across agencies, sectors, and levels of government, including the regulatory mechanisms are some of the key challenges. Now is the time for robust collaboration and action across all sectors and for targeted community-level sensitization. These diseases pose major public health problems and hamper socio-economic development."

"The recently conducted Joint Monitoring Mission on vector-borne diseases in India is a step towards reviewing disease control efforts through the health systems lens to identify and address critical gaps," she added.

Mrs Sujata Saunik, secretary, Public Health, Government of Maharashtra presented the keynote address. Also present on the occasion was Mr Sanjay Deshmukh, additional municipal commissioner, Western Suburbs, Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai.

Mr Raghunath Medge, president, Nutan Mumbai Tiffin Box Suppliers Charity Trust, acknowledged the importance of spreading messages on controlling vector-borne diseases. He said, "Reaching out to a large number of Mumbaikars will certainly have a multiplier effect. Communities at large need to be sensitized and informed about basic preventive tips. We are happy to be associated with WHO for this cause and will do our bit in making the citizens of this city more informed on how to protect themselves and their families."