

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

Community knowledge, attitudes and practices for malaria prevention in Vanuatu

Key points

- Malaria cases in Vanuatu rose sharply from 413 in 2021 to more than 2,000 in 2023, with reductions in 2024.
- This study assessed knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) for malaria prevention in an urban and a rural area.
- Knowledge was mixed - most knew mosquitoes transmit malaria but many linked it to dirty surroundings.
- Bed-net use was low (33-40%) 2 years after distributions while yard clean-ups and mosquito-coil use were common.
- Engagement with health staff during door-to-door visits and net distributions was seen as effective health education.
- Stronger education, higher net uptake, better service access and deeper community engagement are essential to stay on track towards elimination.

Background

Vanuatu set targets of zero indigenous cases by 2028 and malaria elimination by 2032. Yet little is known about how communities understand malaria risk or use prevention tools.

This mixed-methods study by D. Mabon and colleagues explored KAP in two high-risk communities on Espiritu Santo island.

Methods

A KAP survey was completed by 95 participants from Bombua (urban) and Tasiriki (rural). Focus group discussions were used to explore perceptions, behaviours and barriers in greater depth. Findings were summarised descriptively.

Findings

- Knowledge: most participants rated their understanding of malaria transmission and prevention as limited. Fewer than one-third had received malaria prevention information in the past year. About one-third recognised seasonal variation in risk.
- Bed-net use: low rates of bed nets use the previous night were reported by Bombua (33%) and Tasiriki (40%) participants.
- Bite prevention: yard clean-ups (92-96 %) and burning mosquito coils (83-85 %) were common but repellent use was not.
- Access to care: about half of Bombua and two-thirds of Tasiriki participants reported difficulty accessing malaria advice or care, mainly due to distance, limited clinic hours and infrequent outreach.

Implications and recommendations

- **Strengthened social and behavioural change activities** urgently needed to address misconceptions about transmission and to encourage consistent bed-net use. Pairing with bed net distribution and other community activities is likely more efficient and effective.
- **Proactive community clean-ups**, particularly before and during the rainy season, would support environmental management and could be driven by local leaders.
- **Improved access to testing, treatment and advice** is essential, especially in rural areas. Mobile outreach and subsidy schemes for repellents, nets and window screens may help households adopt key prevention practices.

Further information

This summary was produced by the [PacMOSSI](#) consortium. The authors of the original research and the scientific report or publication can be referred to for more details.