

Research into Dengue fever soon

Story: **Rebecca Quaicoe-Duho**

A RESEARCH to ascertain the disease burden of dengue fever on the country is to be conducted soon.

The research, which will bring to light how endemic one of the world's neglected tropic fevers is in the country will be a collaboration between the International Research Consortium on Dengue Risk Assessment, Management and Surveillance (IDAMS) based in Germany and the International Network for the Demographic Evaluation of Populations and their Health in Developing Countries (INDEPTH).

Dengue fever, which has been identified in 34 African countries, is an acute viral disease characterised by a sudden onset of fever for three to five days, with intense headache, joint and muscle pain, pain behind the eyes, nausea, gastrointestinal disturbances and rash.

Minor bleeding, such as gum and nose bleeding, may occur at any time during the febrile phase.

Hitherto a neglected tropical disease, it is an infectious disease transmitted by the aedes mosquito and is characterised by rash and aching head and joints and also causes severe flu-like illness.

Children are said to have a milder form of the disease than adults and the incubation period is three to 14 days, after which recovery may be followed by prolonged fatigue and depression.

Epidemics usually occur during and shortly after the rainy season.

Occasionally, the disease is said to progress to Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever (DHF) with bleeding and shock, leading to death.

At a meeting in Accra to fashion out modalities for the collaborative effort between IDAMS and INDEPTH, it was disclosed that Ghana was surrounded by countries which had had reported outbreaks of dengue fever and there was, therefore, the need for the country to protect itself from the disease.

Ironically, according to the health experts, the disease, which presents itself as malaria, is often treated with malaria drugs which, most often, were ineffective.

According to Dr Raman Velayudhan of the Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases, World Health Organisation (WHO), Geneva, Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean regions represented a global pandemic threat of dengue fever and Ghana was no exception.

Countries which have had outbreaks of the disease include Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Paraguay, Bolivia, Columbia, Nicaragua, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Kenya.

A member of the IDAMS, Mr Thomas Jänisch of the Heidelberg University Hospital, Germany, said at the meeting that what was unknown about the disease in Africa was the transmission intensity, incidence and the number of persons in a population who tested positive to the infection.

Also, the clinical spectrum of dengue in Africa was not well described.

Giving the global trend of the disease, he said dengue had become the most rapidly spreading mosquito-borne disease, with the population at risk being more than 2.5 billion and more than a 100 countries being endemic with it.

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Scientists meet on dengue fever

By Rebecca Kwei

DENGUE fever has been identified as a major public-health concern throughout tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world.

Health experts say it is the most rapidly spreading mosquito-borne viral disease with a 30-fold increase in global incidence over the past 50 years.

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Hitherto, a neglected tropical disease, it is an infectious disease transmitted by the aedes mosquito and is characterised by rash and aching head and joints and also causes severe flu-like illness.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 50-100 million dengue infections occur each year and that almost half of the world's population live in countries where dengue is endemic.

However, in spite of the fact that the presence of all four dengue viruses is established in Africa, little is known about the incidence of the disease, the morbidity and the economic impact of the disease in Africa.

In furtherance to this, a meeting has been held in Accra to assess the current situation of dengue transmission in Africa and the need for research and future control strategies.

The meeting was a collaboration between the International Research Consortium on Dengue Risk Assessment, Management and Surveil-

lance (IDAMS) based in Germany and the INDEPTH Network.

The IDAMS Coordinator, Dr Thomas Jänisch, said not much was known about dengue in Africa and there was the need to uncover the burden of the disease in Africa and response mechanisms put in place.

He said because the clinical presentation of the dengue fever was similar to malaria, it was possible that the dengue fever had been masked by malaria in many countries.

Dr Jänisch said the meeting identified gaps in the current evidence base of the disease and also a research agenda agreed upon as a coordinated action was required to manage the disease in Africa.

On the global trends of dengue, he said there was no effective control strategy for the disease, with the results of first vaccine candidate efficacy trial in 2012 showing disappointing results.

According to Dr Raman Velayudhan of the Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO, Geneva, because the disease has taken the world by surprise, the WHO has developed a global strategy for dengue prevention and control (2012-2020) to reduce the burden of the disease.

He said the specific objectives were to reduce mortality and morbidity from dengue by 2020 by at least 50 per cent and 25 per cent respectively using 2010 as the baseline.

The Executive Director of INDEPTH Network, Prof. Osman Sankoh, said the collaboration would enable them to network to highlight the potential that dengue might have on public health in Africa.

He said because the network generated data it would enable them to provide information on dengue to relevant authorities to monitor progress, as well as learn from other countries on how they had managed dengue outbreaks.

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