

# Paraguay is first country in Americas to eliminate malaria in 45 years

**Celebrating first country in Americas to eliminate disease since Cuba, WHO head says: ‘Success story shows what is possible’**

*Reuters*

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A female *Anopheles stephensi* mosquito feeds on human blood. This mosquito is a vector of the parasite *Plasmodium*, the agent of malaria. Photograph: CDC/Phanie/Rex/Shutterstock

Paraguay is officially free of malaria, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday, making it the first country in the [Americas](#) in 45 years to have wiped out the deadly disease which is back on the rise globally.

Nearly half a million people – most of them babies and children in Africa – died in 2016 from mosquito-borne malaria, while at least 216 million were infected, an increase of 5% over 2015, WHO said.

With no recorded cases of malaria in five years, [Paraguay](#) became the first country in the region to have eliminated malaria since Cuba in 1973, the WHO said. It was the first country to be declared malaria-free since Sri Lanka in 2016.

“It gives me great pleasure today to certify that Paraguay is officially free of malaria,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, head of the WHO, said in a statement.

“Success stories like Paraguay’s show what is possible. If malaria can be eliminated in one country, it can be eliminated in all countries.”

While significant progress has been made over the past 20 years in reducing malaria cases and deaths, in 2016, for the first time in a decade, the number of malaria cases rose and in some areas there was a resurgence, the WHO said.

Health experts say a growing resistance to the sprays and drugs used to attack the mosquito that transmits the disease and the parasite that causes it was partly to blame.

They also say it was partly due to stagnant global funding for malaria since 2010. Climate change and conflict can also exacerbate malaria outbreaks.

“This is a powerful reminder for the region of what can be achieved when countries are focused on an important goal,” said Carissa Etienne, director of the Pan American Health Organization, the WHO’s regional office.

“We are hopeful that other countries will soon join Paraguay in eliminating malaria,” she said in a statement.

In 2016 the WHO identified Paraguay as one of 21 countries with the potential to eliminate malaria by 2020.

The WHO said Algeria, Argentina and Uzbekistan are on track to be declared free from malaria later this year.