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## PRESS RELEASE

### **New research calls for rethink on approach to treating neglected tropical diseases in urban areas**

New research published today in [The Lancet Infectious Diseases](#), suggests the effectiveness of large-scale distribution of medication (known as Mass Drug Administration or MDA) to treat lymphatic filariasis (LF) in urban areas needs to be re-examined.

The researchers from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), Sightsavers, Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research at the University of Ghana, the Ghana Health Service, and the Ministries of Health of Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire, have found that MDA for lymphatic filariasis, whilst highly successful in rural areas, is often challenging and costly to carry out in urban centres.

LF is transmitted to people via mosquito bite and is often categorised by the severe enlargement of body parts, causing pain, disability and stigma. It is one of a group of preventable and treatable conditions known as **neglected tropical diseases** (NTDs). 120 million people worldwide are infected with LF, classifying it as the world's leading cause of physical disability.

Currently, LF treatment programmes in both rural and urban areas, focus on the distribution of preventive drugs to people irrespective of their infection status. However the new research indicates that MDA in urban centres is more expensive and presents particular challenges. As a result, it is difficult to achieve the standard of reaching 65% of the population with medication consistently - the coverage required to achieve elimination of LF transmission. This therefore poses a key challenge to the global goal of eliminating LF as public health problem by 2020.

Professor David Molyneux, a co-author of the research from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, said: "This paper has policy implications for lymphatic filariasis programmes and raises questions about the need for mass drug distribution given the evidence that transmission is limited in urban settings in West Africa. The problems faced by the filariasis community in addressing these challenges reflects a wider problem of how to tackle urban neglected tropical diseases given the increased rate of rural- urban migration, resource limitations and population heterogeneity."

The research calls for more detailed studies into the effectiveness of MDA in densely populated towns and cities in Africa. It also argues that greater focus needs to be placed on vector control to minimise the risk of contracting LF from mosquito bites such as: long-



lasting insecticidal nets, mosquito repellents and improved housing structures in African cities.

Simon Bush, a co-author from Sightsavers, said: “The research published today illustrates that we must continue to analyse our approach to treating neglected tropical diseases. Bringing together experts to review the issues identified, along with the resulting consequences for national programmes, is essential.”

**\*\*ENDS\*\***

#### Notes to editors:

The research paper is available on The Lancet Infectious Diseases website:

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(18\)30069-0/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(18)30069-0/fulltext)

#### **LSTM**

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) is the world's oldest centre of excellence in tropical medicine and international public health. It has been engaged in the fight against infectious, debilitating and disabling diseases since 1898 and continues that tradition today with a research portfolio in excess of well over £210 million and a teaching programme attracting students from over 65 countries.

For further information please visit: [www.lstmed.ac.uk](http://www.lstmed.ac.uk)

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#### **Sightsavers**

Sightsavers is an international organisation that works in more than 30 developing countries to combat neglected tropical diseases, prevent blindness, restore sight and advocate for social inclusion and equal rights for people with disabilities.

It is a registered UK charity (registered charity numbers 207544 and SC038110)

[www.sightsavers.org](http://www.sightsavers.org)

In the six decades since its foundation, Sightsavers has:

- Worked with a network of partners to deliver one billion treatment for neglected tropical diseases
- Carried out over 9.39 million operations to restore sight
- Provided 522,000 training sessions for primary eye care workers
- Provided 210, 889 training sessions for blind, low vision or other disabled beneficiaries



- Supported many thousands of children to gain a school education, with 5,162 children receiving support in 2016

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