

The COVID-19 pandemic is raising questions about risks in reliable LLIN supply chains

While governments are scrambling to determine the right response to the COVID-19 pandemic, production and distribution sectors are being impacted around the world. National governments are concerned both about their citizens contracting this deadly disease and also the severe economic impact of this pandemic.

As a company that manufactures long-lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLINs), our goal is to ensure a reliable LLIN supply chain. Since 2000, long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) have prevented some 70% of malaria cases in areas of the world where half the population is at risk. During COVID-19, we want to safeguard that people continue to remain protected from malaria by raising awareness of the value of reliable LLIN supply chains on [World Malaria Day](#).

The COVID-19 impact on the supply chain impacts the fight against malaria

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Vestergaard has been working to secure a reliable supply chain for LLINs. As we are committed to our core values of passionateering®, being an innovative challenger, maintaining our speed of response, delivering with precision, and abiding by our social responsibility, we were aware that we had to address several issues that could put our LLIN delivery at risk.

The entire supply chain involves a great deal of exchange. From production to transportation from warehousing to delivery, supply chains require a systematic process. Removing or halting a single element, such as through national lockdowns, can disrupt the delivery to the end-user.

In regions where malaria is prevalent, particularly India and Africa, the COVID-19 crisis has the potential to affect access to these lifesaving LLINs. A disruption in the delivery of the LLIN could result in sicknesses and deaths due to malaria, deaths which could far outpace those resulting from COVID-19.



A female health worker with PPE distributes LLINs in Africa during COVID-19

The next major step was to ensure that in-country delivery logistics would allow the citizens of countries like Togo, Nigeria, and Sudan to receive their much-needed LLINs. This meant we had to ascertain whether African ports would be open, the length of time ships would be quarantined before being allowed to enter, and whether regular LLIN distributions would take place as scheduled.

The greatest challenge is perhaps ensuring the LLINs end up where they need to go. National lockdowns, by and large, threaten the steps taken to secure a reliable LLIN supply chain in the face of COVID-19. In India, reliable LLIN distribution has been largely disrupted by the lockdown because trucks cannot move until early May to the final warehouses in malaria endemic states such as Assam and Tripura. The task then is to re-imagine how to get our LLINs to the people who need them.

An Opportunity to Re-imagine How to Reach People in Need

Some countries, like Uganda, are delaying their LLIN distributions by a month to review their plans for registering households and to also minimize people's exposure to COVID-19 during the distribution process. As mentioned earlier, African communities typically transform LLIN mass distribution campaigns into festive gatherings. Now they will have to organize a safer mode of distribution.

In Benin, the mass campaign distribution kicked off in April and will take the form of door-to-door distribution. Going forward, it will be critical to adequately protect health workers with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).



Health workers in Benin distribute LLINs during COVID-19

Throughout, our teams have remained in close contact with the global institutions that procure LLINs and the national malaria programs that receive them. We have wanted to reassure that production would not come to a halt and that the mosquito nets would be ready for shipment before monsoon season when malaria transmission is at its peak.

The extraordinary circumstances of COVID-19 require us to think strategically and innovate around risk mitigation. As a socially-responsible company that produces and distributes a critical commodity that saves lives, Vestergaard is seeking to ensure that we achieve our end goal. For us, this means attending to every aspect of the supply chain so we can ensure a reliable LLIN supply chain for the most vulnerable populations in malaria-endemic countries.

This year's World Malaria Day, we will do everything we can to prevent the Coronavirus pandemic from expanding into multiple health crises.

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