# Malaria

Malaria represents a major public health concern in Solomon Islands, especially among those who are particularly vulnerable such as pregnant women and children under five years of age. It is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Solomon Islands, and poses a high burden in both societal and economic terms. Most parts of the country report transmission throughout the year, though it increases during and soon after the rainy season.

## Mosquito nets

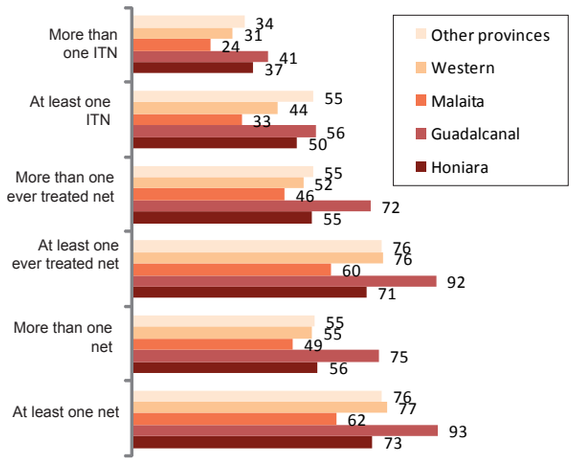
The use of insecticide treated mosquito nets (ITNs) is a key part of the Solomon Islands Government primary health intervention aimed at reducing malaria transmission in Solomon Islands. A net that has been treated with insecticide kills and repels mosquitoes with greater effectiveness than a net that has never been treated; however, not as effectively as a net that was treated within the last 12 months or was made with a long lasting insecticide.

## Ownership of mosquito nets

Three quarters of all households in both urban and rural areas own at least one mosquito net; ownership ranges from a high 93 per cent on Guadalcanal to a lower 62 per cent on Malaita.

On the other hand, the availability of insecticide treated nets (INT) is much lower, affecting only one in 2 households in both urban (50.3%) and rural (48.3%) areas. Ownership is highest on Guadalcanal (56%), with only 1 in 3 Malaita households having access to an ITN. Socio-economic factors appear of only marginal importance, with ITN ownership in the highest wealth quintile marginally higher (52%) than in the lowest quintile (42%).

### Household ownership of mosquito nets (%)

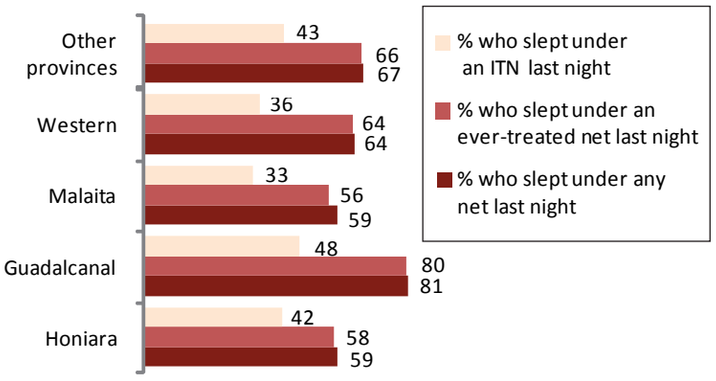



The low proportion of currently treated nets in relation to overall net ownership indicates that nets are not being re-treated as often as recommended.

## Use of mosquito nets

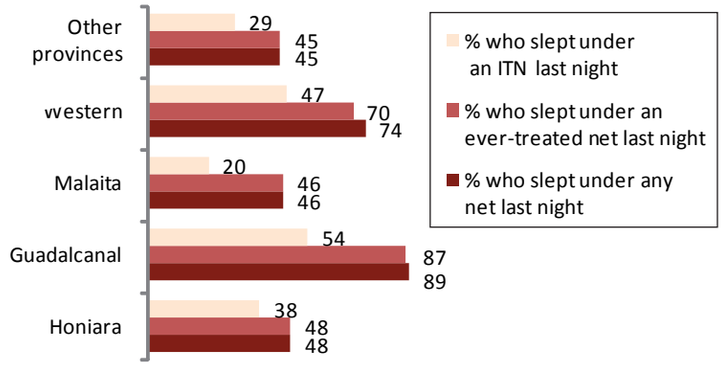
Two thirds of children under five slept under a net the night before the survey. The highest rate of net use was reported for Guadalcanal, where 81 per cent of children slept under a net the night before the survey. Use of ITNs was significantly lower, with less than half of children under five (40.4%) having slept under an ITN.

### Use of mosquito nets by children




A greater proportion of children under five slept under a mosquito net compared to women. Only 35 per cent of all women and 36.5 per cent of pregnant women slept under an ITN the night before the survey.

### Use of mosquito nets by pregnant women

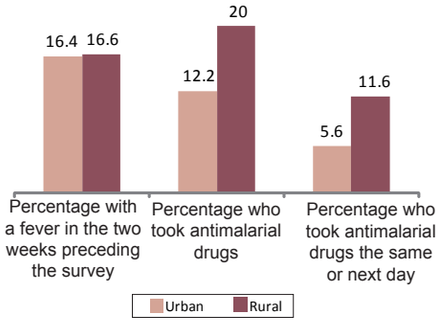



Higher rates of net use were reported among women living in rural households; 58.3 per cent of women in rural areas slept under a net compared with only 44.8 per cent of their urban counterparts. The highest rates (as was observed for children), were recorded for Guadalcanal, with 75 per cent of women aged 15–49 having slept under a net the night before the survey.

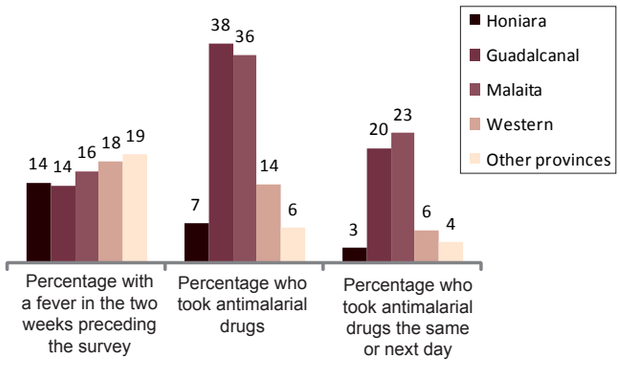
## Treatment of children with fever

One in 6 children under five had a fever in the two weeks preceding the survey. Nineteen per cent of these children were given antimalarial drugs.

Rural children with fever are more likely to receive antimalarials as a presumptive treatment for malaria than their urban counterparts. This is because of lower coverage of microscopy services for diagnosis in rural areas.




The number of children with a fever in the two weeks preceding the survey does not differ that much across provinces; the treatment, however, is very different. Children in Malaita and Guadalcanal in particular are treated with antimalarials for a fever much more frequently than in any other province.




## Prophylactic use of antimalarial drugs

In the two years preceding the survey 93 per cent of pregnant women took some form of antimalarial drug for prevention of malaria during pregnancy for their last live birth.

**Policy note:**

Malaria remains one of the biggest killers in Solomon Islands. Some areas appear better protected against vector borne diseases than others. However, treated bed nets are not used universally, and pregnant women and children do not appear to be taking the benefit of the nets that are in households.

Bed nets are a proven cost effective way of preventing malaria. In line with the Solomon Islands Vector Borne Disease Control Program (VBDCP), continued distribution of ITNs and perhaps a re-treatment programme, are needed to compliment this strategy, carried out in conjunction with comprehensive community education and awareness programmes.

Improvements are needed in the reliability and quality of diagnostic services , and they must be accessible for all, particularly in rural areas.

* For more information on malaria see chapter 12 in the full 2007 SI DHS report